

# FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

## *ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE*

Interviewee: **Frank Edward Pultar**

Interview Date: 11/01/2017

Interviewer: Jane Goodsill

Transcriber: Marsha Smith

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13 Pages



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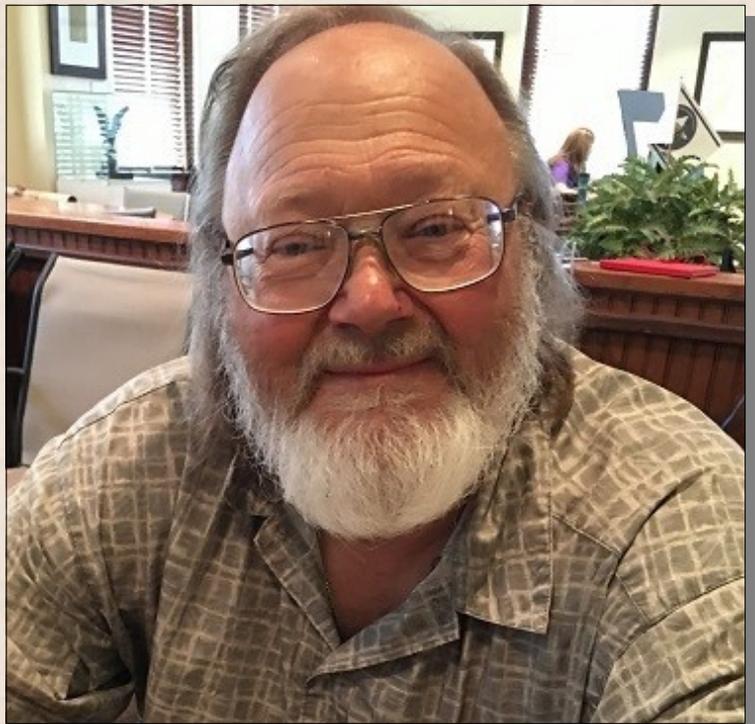
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*Transcript*

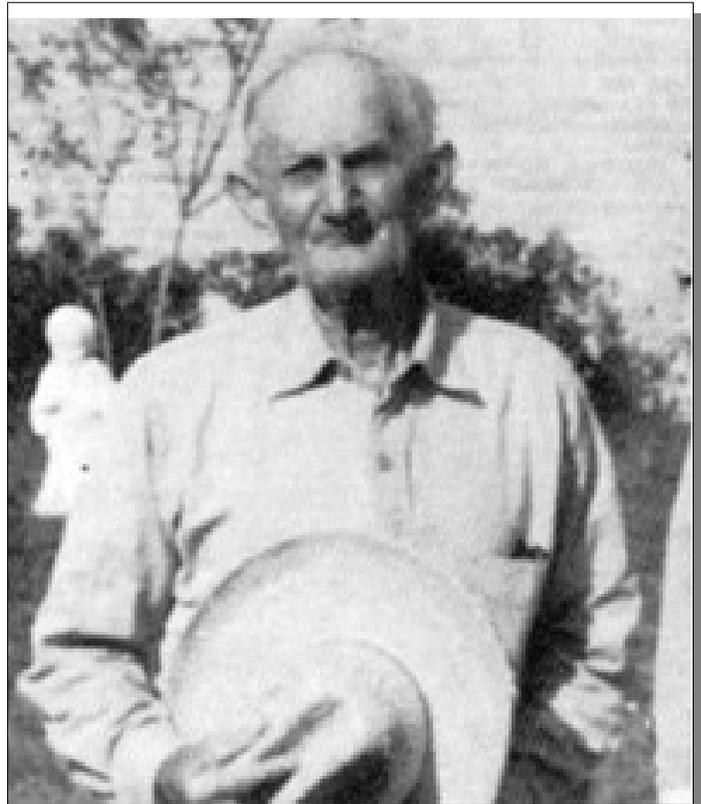
GOODSILL: How did your people get to Fort Bend County.

PULTAR: My grandfather, on my father's side, first came to Texas around 1900, to do a scouting mission. I think he landed in Galveston at that time. He didn't want his children to be involved in a war, so the Pultar family decided to come to the United States several years later. There is some history at the Fort Bend County Museum. There is a passenger list and a pamphlet from the boat that they were on, that landed in Baltimore. They came into the port of Baltimore, and they lived a couple of years in the Baltimore area on a plantation. I remember my Aunt Christine telling us there were still shackles in the basement.

GOODSILL: What was your grandfather's name?

PULTAR: Jon Pultar. As far as I know, they resided right on the border of Czechoslovakia and Russia. They were carpenters by trade. To subsidize their income, they harvested crops. I'm not sure what crops, but I think it might have been wheat.

My grandmother's name was Mary. My father, John Edward, was born in Cuba, Kansas. The family went from Baltimore to Kansas, and they didn't like it in Kansas, so they came to Fort Bend County. They settled in Fairchilds and lived there for a while. Then my cousin, Vaclav Pultar, and his brother, Vladja, came. They are buried in the Fairchilds Cemetery. I don't know if he was much older than my father. He was a young man in his twenties when he came over.



*Frank's cousin, a Russian emigre, Vaclav Pultar. --courtesy <http://absolutelybrazos.com>*

GOODSILL: Tell us about the Fairchilds Cemetery.

PULTAR: I know that's where they are buried because I went to the funerals. It's been so long since I've been out there that I don't remember exactly where it is. It's the oldest cemetery in Fairchilds, I believe. During the time they were living in Fairchilds and farming, they helped establish the First Presbyterian Church in Needville, the church I grew up in.

GOODSILL: Do you remember your grandfather?

PULTAR: No. He was born in 1863 and died in 1935.

My father didn't marry until he was 40 years old. He had five sisters, four older and one younger. By tradition, he couldn't marry until all his sisters were married. My mother was Clara Kusy.

My father farmed in Fairchilds. The property we wound up buying ended up in a sheriff's auction. The Wessendorffs had gone bankrupt at the time and were selling off their property. So, my grandfather and Vaclav bought property right next door to each other. All that property where the Richmond State School is now used to belong to Vaclav. It was cheap, and they had saved their money. His portion was over 200 acres and ours was 101 acres. There is a deed of sale when the State of Texas bought the property, and there might be more information. They bought it to establish the Richmond State School.



*Frank Putar's grandfather's gravestone.*



*Frank Putar's grandmother's gravestone.*

That's why we have Pultar Road. The state thought that since we had owned that property, and there was a road there with no name on it, they would name it Pultar Road. To honor Vaclav, they named the road that went to his property Rocky Falls Road. He had opened his property up because it was close to the river. He had put roads in there where people could camp and picnic. I guess it was before we had state parks. He would charge people fifty cents for the day, and a dollar for the night, if they camped there. It was a

very popular place. It's called Rocky Falls because there used to be a ten-foot waterfall there. In 1900, somebody had the bright idea that if you dynamited it, you could make the Brazos River navigable past that point. But all it did was create rapids. There was a beach where people could go into the river there, and the water was slow-moving because of the obstruction of the rocks, created by the dynamiting.

GOODSILL: So he had a recreation area there that people used?

PULTAR: Yes, up until he sold the property in 1962.

GOODSILL: Tell me how Vaclav was related to you.

PULTAR: He was my second cousin. He was the nephew of the original John Pultar, the son of John's brother. The brother didn't come to Fairchilds, but the two boys came as well as John.

GOODSILL: Vaclav was the age of your father, John?

PULTAR: No, he was older by 10 or 15 years. He's buried in Fairchilds.



*Present on November 12, 1962 during the official closing of the land where the Richmond State Supported Living Center would be built were Vaclav, in the white jacket, right side, and John Pultar and their families. Kathleen Lindsey handled the closing and transfer documents.*

*--photo courtesy of Richmond State Supported Living Center Archives.*

GOODSILL: So John comes and farms, and then Vaclav comes. Did the family farm at the Wessendorff location?

PULTAR: I think they bought that property in 1920. They farmed mostly cotton and corn. On the side, Vaclav had a horse-drawn wagon that he would load with milk, eggs, butter, and firewood that he had cut. He sold this to the black community who lived across the tracks adjacent to us. He did that for years. The kids in the neighborhood would jump on his wagon and ride on his wagon. One time, one of the kids fell off the wagon, and the parents sued him. That put an end to that. But, he was the convenience store before there were convenience stores. He was the most honest man I ever knew. He was short and bent over. He would have been taller, but he told me that when he was in his teens, he was running across a field and stepped in a hole and hurt his back. He spoke Russian and Czech; he spoke several different dialects of Russian.

He was a very self-educated man. He converted to Seventh Day Adventist Church. He was very devout in his faith and contributed a lot to establishing the Seventh Day Adventist Church, not just in Fort Bend County but all across Texas. When they needed funding to build a church or a building, they came to him.

GOODSILL: Was anybody else in the family a member of that church?

PULTAR: Only his wife, Anna. He met her through correspondence by letters. She was the widow of a police officer in Chicago. The year that he went there to marry her was the year of the Chicago World's Fair! He brought her back down here. They never had any children. She was such a sweet lady, and she made the best pecan cinnamon rolls you have ever had. They had a wood-fired oven that she baked in. Whenever I got in trouble at home, I would go to their house, to avoid getting a whipping. This was on Pultar Road in Richmond.

GOODSILL: What were the houses like?

PULTAR: Simple, didn't have indoor plumbing. Had an outhouse. This was while I was growing up. Even when we got a toilet installed in the house, my maternal grandmother would not use the toilet in the house. She still went to the outhouse. (laughs)

GOODSILL: What was your maternal grandmother's name?

PULTAR: Mary Kusy.

GOODSILL: Jon was married to a woman named Mary. Clara's mother was Mary as well; what was her father's name?

PULTAR: John. They had four children: Herman, Millie, Clara, and Alfred.

GOODSILL: Do you remember your cousin Voltar?

PULTAR: He was short, and he had a work ethic that exceeded anything I ever saw. He didn't stop for anything until the job was done. If I wanted to earn extra money, I would go help him cut firewood. I was paid a dollar a day, for a day's hard labor! I would spend it on comic books and cracker jacks.

GOODSILL: And you're living in a house with no plumbing.

PULTAR: We did until after we sold the property. Somebody told my father that we needed to build a new house. So, from the sale of the property, we built the new house and sold the existing one. It's probably still being used. Since they were carpenters, they built the house, they built the barn, and they built Vaclav's house and barn together.

GOODSILL: When the State wanted to buy their land, did they just get a deal that was too good that they couldn't refuse?

PULTAR: Vaclav was getting up in years, and he didn't have any children. He felt that the use of that land for the Richmond State School was his monument to humanity. That's how he explained it to me.

GOODSILL: Where did they build their new house?

PULTAR: Right on the same property. We sold 40 acres and retained 61 acres. A house mover came, bought the house, and moved it off the property. Then my father had a modern brick house built on the same property. I think the house was built in 1963.

GOODSILL: I bet your life changed then!

PULTAR: Not really, because there were two girls and four boys. No one got their own room. The four boys were in one room, and my sisters had to share. The biggest bedroom was the boys' bedroom.

GOODSILL: John and Clara had six children. Name them in birth order.

PULTAR: Marianne, (Dec 5, 1949) Paul John, (Dec 10, 1950), me (Frank Edward), (July 28, 1952) and then my sister Clara Jane, (Mar 17, 1953), Willie, (July 12, 1954) and Charles, (1956 I think).

GOODSILL: Your mother was busy! The boys were all in one room?

PULTAR: I do think there should have been more bedrooms!

GOODSILL: Why do you supposed there weren't?

PULTAR: I think it had to do with the culture. That's just the way it was.

GOODSILL: Tell me about your grandfather. Was he involved in a church in any way?

PULTAR: Not at the time, but there's a story told that back in Czechoslovakia, because the ruler of the country was Catholic, he was pushing for everyone to convert to Catholicism. My family was Protestant. The family would always make bread on a Monday night and study the Bible. That was not allowed. So, the Catholic powers-that-be came knocking at the door, looking for the Bible. The family hid the Bible in a loaf of bread and put it in the oven. The Catholics tore the house up looking for the Bible, but didn't find it. Vaclav had the Bible in his possession and donated it to a Czech museum in Hallettsville. I haven't been able to find out which museum has it. There are several in that area. Supposedly the bread is still on the cover. It has a lot of family history written in it.

GOODSILL: Do you ever think about the life that your grandfather led? It was a big thing leaving his country and coming to a new country.

PULTAR: Oh, yes. I'm only second generation.

GOODSILL: Did your father speak with an accent?

PULTAR: No. But when I started grade school, I was sent home with a note that said, "Please only speak English at home." My maternal grandmother only spoke Czech, and the only way to talk to her was to speak Czech. So, I was made to forget my language. After she passed away, I was 18 or 19, and I stopped speaking Czech. The only ones who still spoke Czech were my aunts, and I didn't see them very much because I was such a rebellious teen-ager.

GOODSILL: Tell me a little more about your father.

PULTAR: He had an 8th grade education.

GOODSILL: Did he farm all his life?

PULTAR: My mother's father farmed the property with his two sons. They lived in the same house with us. My father worked for Imperial Sugar, in the refinery. They had a swing shift, and for a two-week period, he would work 8-5, then the next shift was graveyard. He retired from Imperial. When I got out of high school, he asked if I wanted a job there. I said, "No. I don't want nepotism." It was the principle of the thing.

GOODSILL: You came of age at a pretty rebellious time, and it affected you.

PULTAR: Oh, yes.

GOODSILL: You were born in 1952. Tell us about your life.

PULTAR: I basically stayed in Fort Bend County. I was at Lamar Consolidated. I didn't graduate from high school because of my rebelliousness. In English class, you had to write a research paper every year in high school. I was in my senior year, and everyone was writing their research papers. I had to work my butt off to get where I was. I refused to do a research paper because I didn't think it was fair. The English teacher said, "Well, you aren't going to graduate." I didn't graduate from high school, again because of my rebelliousness.

GOODSILL: This is what year?

PULTAR: 1970-1971 school year.

GOODSILL: The Vietnam war was winding down. Did the draft concern you?

PULTAR: I did get drafted in 1971, but because there were so many males born in 1952, they took only the ones from June to January. My brother had older friends who had been to Vietnam, and they all told me, "You don't want to go. Do whatever you have to do, but don't go over there." So, I was in a dilemma. I was drafted and was waiting to be called to be processed. I was trying to decide if I should go to Canada or Mexico. After several weeks of thinking about it, I decided it was fate, and no matter what I did, fate would catch up with me. A week after I decided that, I got the letter saying I didn't have to report. I continued through the year. The next year, I enrolled to try to finish my education, but the principal made it VERY difficult, so I dropped out. He didn't want me there, my being 19 years old.

I worked at Fort Bend Feed and Farm Supply for Mason Briscoe for a while. Then a friend told me about a job opening at Katy Drilling Company. They drilled municipal wells and irrigation wells. So, I went to work over there. At that time, I had hair down to my shoulders; I had a full beard. When I applied, the personnel guy said, "Well, if you cut your hair and shave your beard, I'll guarantee that you'll make \$1,000 a month." That was a lot of money back then, so I did it! After working there about six months, I realized I wasn't making the money he promised. So, since he broke his promise, I broke my promise. I continued working there. When I was 25, I was at a bar called The Wounded Armadillo. I met this lady, Grace, who would become my wife. She originally was working at the Brazos Bend Hotel as the night clerk, to earn money. One of the waitresses at the bar said they needed someone to fill in, and they asked her to fill in.

That's when we met. She didn't have transportation at the time. She was depending on friends to take her to work. So, I took her home, and that was the start of our relationship. A year later, we got married in Needville.

GOODSILL: You lived in Needville?

PULTAR: No, we lived in Houston, in the Sharpstown area. My family lives in Richmond. No one is in Needville, except some of the Denecks. She had two children from a previous marriage. We had a son, Edward Frank Pultar, born January 22, 1983. This was during the recession.

Katy Drilling was bought out by Layne Western Drilling, and they moved the operation into Houston, off I-10. I continued to work for them for 12 years. Then they started laying people off. Houston started shutting down because of the economy. Grace's mother had just retired, and she'd moved to Utah to be close to her son and grand kids there. We decided that before I got laid off, we'd just pull up stakes and move to Utah.

So, in 1985, we moved to Salt Lake City. Grace worked for the IRS and was able to transfer her job to Salt Lake City, and that's what we lived on. I had a part-time job when we lived in Houston, working for a bicycle assembly company that was a subsidiary of Huffy Bicycles. I would go to stores and put together the bicycles that their customers bought, and if they needed displays, I would put those together. I continued to do that until 1988. In 1987, I put in an application with the Utah Transit Authority, and they hired me. That was right before the ADA was enacted. They were trying to get ahead of the ADA compliance and wanted to start a para-transit service in Salt Lake. So, I ended up being a para-transit driver for 27 years.

GOODSILL: Do you have any other memories from your school days?

PULTAR: After the Richmond State School was built, they were looking for aides to work with the people who lived there. They came to the junior high and were recruiting volunteers to help with the activities there, when the staff was off on weekends. The name of the organization was Teens Aid the Retarded. So, we were called TARs. I was a member. It was so close, I could just walk over there. I guess it's been a part of my life, being of service. I think I learned that from my cousin, Vaclav.

GOODSILL: Was your father like that as well?

PULTAR: Yes, I think he was. One time, one of his co-workers came to our house. His son had been put in jail, and he didn't have the money to bail him out. So, he asked my father to sign the bond to get his son out of jail. As far as I know, my father did that. When I was growing up, my grandfather and his sons hired pickers when it was time to pick the cotton. They were mostly black and some were Hispanic. I was never a prejudiced person because I knew them. I knew they were hard working. I tried to pick cotton. I came home and told my dad, "I'm not doing that again! I feel like my back is broken." It was backbreaking work to pull that pick-sack behind you.

As far as I remember, my relatives never mistreated them. Never cheated them, but treated them as equals. I remember in the 6th grade, we were walking back from the cafeteria at Jane Long, and somebody came running up to us. Excuse my language, but he said, "Hey! We're going to be going to school with the )“n” word) next year" I was ignorant. I said, "You mean, they go to school?" Because I never saw them at school.

GOODSILL: So what was it like, going to school with the black kids?

PULTAR: Everybody wanted to get along. When I got to high school, in drama class I got to know a lot of the black kids very well, because we'd go to drama tournaments and debate tournaments together.

GOODSILL: Let's go back to what brings you to Texas right now. You're here to settle some legal things. I want to know about the pauper's grave, the cemetery they may have discovered on your land.

PULTAR: There is actual documentation that it does exist. When it was auctioned off, no one thought it was important to disclose that. (laughter) It was a Sheriff's Auction. The cemetery is on the back side. (drawing a picture, showing where the State School is, where the farm is, and approximately the location of the cemetery).

GOODSILL: How did it come to your attention that there was a cemetery there?

PULTAR: From the Historical Commission. There is documentation that it exists and when somebody is doing due diligence, they are going to find it.

GOODSILL: What is the consequence of finding a graveyard on your property?

PULTAR: I guess it is kind of beneficial and yet detrimental as far as the value of the property is concerned. I've been thinking of what the best way is to deal with it once the boundaries of the cemetery are established. I think the best thing to do is to turn that area into a park. Then it has public access, and part of the history of Fort Bend County is preserved. Otherwise it won't be.

GOODSILL: Do you know anything about who the paupers were, or what year they were buried?

PULTAR: I don't know. I think Bob [Crosser] knows.

GOODSILL: First, they have to figure out how big it is. Then maybe they can figure out how many people are buried there, and what to do with this property.

PULTAR: And who knows who has relatives buried there?

GOODSILL: Did any of your family know about this?

PULTAR: No, because my father never mentioned it. And all the time I spent hunting and roaming that area, I remember seeing places where there were depressions, but they weren't in one area. They were in several places. There are no gravestones.

GOODSILL: So how does your cousin, Charles Stutzenbaker, come into this story?

PULTAR: His mother is Christine Pultar, one of my aunts. He has a lot more information on the family and on their life in Czechoslovakia before they came over. One of my other aunts married a Deneck, and one of her daughters still lives in Fairchilds on the farm. The son, Henry Deneck, just moved out toward Fulshear.

GOODSILL: So how many family members still live on your property near the Richmond State School?

PULTAR: Just my sister. My brother, Willie, has his own place in Crabb. My mother left my father's will as it was. All it said was that everyone gets an equal share. Since my mother passed, I tried to get my brothers and sisters to agree to divide it up. We all need a place to live, and if you have your own piece of property, you can do with it as you want. But now it's down to three of us; me, Clara, and Willie.

GOODSILL: Is anything else you want to tell us about your father's life or history of the Pultars?

PULTAR: Just that he was a decent man. We did have our differences. He died in 1977, but before he died, I came to see him. He was out, struggling to put the implements on the tractor. Those implements were so huge and so heavy, and he was struggling to put them on by himself since we [the sons] were all gone. I walked up there and grabbed one of the implements, put it in place, and without a wrench I tightened the bolt. My father stepped back and said, "You know, Frank, out of all my kids, I thought you would be the worst one. But you're not."

About a month later, he had to go in for surgery for an aneurysm. It was considered to be a fairly routine surgery. I drove him to the hospital and was with him when he was checked in. I was the one who was brave enough to drive in Houston! (laughing).

I was going to come back the next day to bring the family to see him, and then we found out that he had died. What happened was he was sitting up in his hospital room. He rolled his own cigarettes, and had rolled a cigarette. He was smoking and talking to the doctors, and a blood clot went to his brain. The doctors were right there, and they couldn't save him. I was glad to have made amends with him.

GOODSILL: Anything else you want to tell me about your cousin, Vaclav? He was a hard worker, he was industrious, he had a sense of civic contribution and was also quite entrepreneurial.

PULTAR: He was very devout in his beliefs. He was the most religious man I've ever met. He knew the Bible forward and backwards.

GOODSILL: Did he carry his Czech traditions with him?

PULTAR: Yes. He was the first one who actually showed me the stars and the constellations. We would sit on his back porch, and he would point them out. Then my father started doing it also.

GOODSILL: It seems as though your family owes quite a bit to him. He was a leader.

PULTAR: Yes. He was the patriarch of the family. We still have relatives in the Czech Republic. My great-uncle, who I was named after, is still there.

Interview ends