FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Franklin Royce Schodek**

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Interviewer: Karl Baumgartner

Transcriber: Sylvia Vacek

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Transcript

BAUMGARTNER: Today is August 6, 2018. My name is Karl Baumgartner and I am interviewing Mr. Franklin Schodek in Richmond, Texas on behalf of the Fort Bend County Historical Commission. This interview is part of the Fort Bend County Historical Commission Oral History Project. By way of introduction, Mr. Schodek is a professional surveyor whose years of research in Fort Bend County have provided extensive knowledge of the historical development in the area. In 2017 he was the recipient of the Bert E. Bleil Heritage Award presented by FBCHC for his contribution to local historical and cultural preservation.

SCHODEK: I was very proud of that. It was a very nice recognition by the Commission.

BAUMGARTNER: I was pleased to see that announcement. Franklin, what is your full legal name?

SCHODEK: Franklin Royce Schodek. If you look in the Czech dictionary, the Czech pronunciation is Shonek instead of Schodek. About two weeks ago I met with six of my cousins and I am still Bubba Schonek to them.

Franklin Schodek in 1937

BAUMGARTNER: What is your date of birth and where were you born?

SCHODEK: I was born January 2, 1937 in a house on the corner of Avenue O and Fifth Street here in Rosenberg. My mother, Hermina Amelia Schodek, had her three sisters, Emma, Ollie and Lena, as midwives.

BAUMGARTNER: People did not go to the hospital as much in those days?

SCHODEK: My brother, Daniel Lewis, was born four years later and he was born in the Rosenberg Hospital that was on the east end of Avenue G.

BAUMGARTNER: The old hospital that used to sit right across from what was First National Bank on Avenue H.

SCHODEK: On the north side of old highway 90A, that is correct. It was a wood frame building and it didn't seem like it was a very big building from what I remember. It was later torn down.

BAUMGARTNER: Was that your family's house where you were born?

SCHODEK: No it wasn't. To start at the beginning, my family immigrated here around the turn of the century. My grandfather was from a town called Mrtin in the Czech Republic, about thirty miles from the capital city of Prague. His name was Charles Frank Schodek and in 1895 he came into the

United States through Ellis Island, in New York City harbor, and made his way to Wallis, Texas. He married a lady by the name of Louise Sklar, my grandmother. They had seven children, five girls and two boys. My father was number five, born 1909.

BAUMGARTNER: What was your dad's name?

SCHODEK: Frank Louis Schodek. Grandfather was a tinsmith and they lived in downtown Wallis, a little town fifteen miles west of Rosenberg. They lived in a small two story house where the Wallis National Bank is now located. He had his tin shop at ground level underneath the house and they lived upstairs.

Schodek tin shop & residence in Wallis, TX

BAUMGARTNER: Where was your grandmother from?

SCHODEK: Apparently she was from around Wallis; we never did find out anything about her.

BAUMGARTNER: A lot of Czechs were showing up in this area at that time.

SCHODEK: Yes, at about the same time, my mother's family came from Hostalakova, also in the Czech Republic. That also was in 1895. My grandpa Jan Sabrsula and his wife Rozina Molina arrived with his two girls, my Aunt Janie and Aunt Rosie who had been born in the Czech Republic. His brother, Tomas, who apparently wasn't married, made his way to Bremen, Germany and caught the ship and came with them to Galveston.

BAUMGARTNER: All of them together?

SCHODEK: This is what we understand. They went from Galveston to the community of Sunny Side up north of Brookshire and they stayed in Sunny Side for a while with people who we understand were relatives, and then wound up in Wallis. Grandpa bought a farm halfway between Wallis and Sealy, built a house and raised his family. Grandpa Jan and Rozina had ten children. My mom was born there. I never knew my grandmother Rozina; she died in 1934 and I was born in 1937.

BAUMGARTNER: My goodness they had large families in those days.

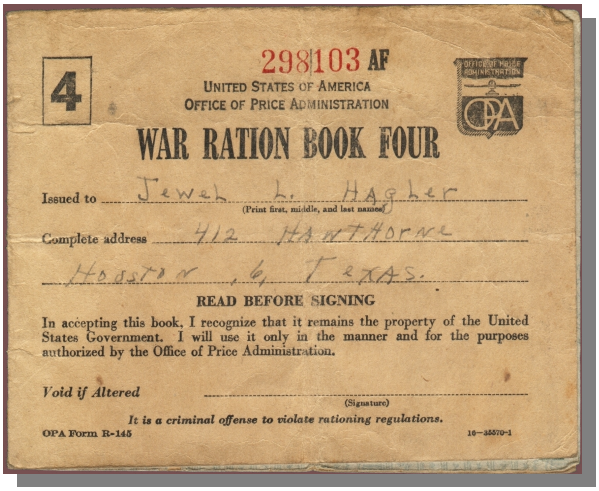
SCHODEK: Yes, I have a bunch of cousins. On my daddy's sides I had six aunts and uncles and I had nine on my mother's side. I should have run for office! We saw a lot of the relatives through the years growing up.

BAUMGARTNER: World War II was just about to start when you were born.

SCHODEK: Looking back on it, our parents did a wonderful job in just raising us. I was born in 1937 and the Second World War started immediately. Getting through the Second World War was more taxing than you realize. People just didn't realize how difficult it was. I have very clear memories of it.

You had to have stamps to buy anything. Everything was rationed. For instance you could get only so much gasoline, I believe it was five gallons of gas a week. You were required to have a stamp. Even if you had the money, if you didn't have that stamp, it was a little stamp that came in a booklet, and you couldn't buy gas. Just living through things like that, you don't forget it. One of the things that remain very sharp in my memory is that my mother was an excellent cook and of course you do not cook without sugar. Sugar was very, very hard to get during the War. One of the grocery stores here in Rosenberg at the time, right across the street on the corner of Avenue H and Fifth Street, was Drgac's, owned by a little bitty old Polish or Czech couple who ran the place. The store building was just a tiny store, probably twenty feet wide and three feet long. What I remember was that if Mother wanted some sugar the Drgacs would sell her a pound bag of sugar if she would come up there at night and pick it up where nobody saw her get the sugar.

Editor's Note: *Click this link to read more about rationing during WW II.*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(Print first, middle, and last names)

Complete address 412 Hawthorne
Houston, 6, Texas.

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Void if Altered
(Signature)

It is a criminal offense to violate rationing regulations.

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BAUMGARTNER: Really.

SCHODEK: I remember my Uncle Charlie, Mom's brother; he had polio and was a cripple. He was functional but his arm was bent real funny and he couldn't walk upright. But he had two mules and worked cutting hay and cutting grass for people. There was a short article and pictures of him in the Houston Chronicle back then with a photo of him and his mules and wagon pulling his hay mower in Wallis. So like I said he had polio but it didn't stop him and he had to get by and he was functional.

Editor's Note: Polio (poliomyelitis) is a contagious viral illness that can cause nerve injury leading to paralysis, difficulty breathing and sometimes death. An iron lung is a nearly obsolete mechanical respirator, utilized in the 1900's, which enables a person to breathe when muscle control has been damaged by certain diseases such as polio. *Click this link to read more about the disease*.

At that point in time we had the war; we had the rationing; and we had polio. Polio was a scary, scary thing. Up until 1953 when Jonas Salk invented the serum you were always worried about it.

You could not identify symptoms or anything. Like I said, our family had a firsthand experience with it, and I remember another occasion when through one of the church groups, we visited the home of a young man who had contracted polio. The young man had been equipped with an iron lung and I can almost still remember that boom, boom. That was scary. It got you right to the bone. That was hard.

BAUMGARTNER: One of my close childhood friends got polio growing up. He was on crutches and in a wheelchair for the entire rest of his life. He had no use of his legs. We used to play touch football in the back yard and he played quarterback, sitting in his wheelchair. His arms were strong from rolling his wheelchair along and he was a good passer. He never regained use of his legs.

SCHODEK: Another family trauma took place during the Second World War, when my father was drafted into the Army in 1944 at age thirty five.

BAUMGARTNER: Really! The war was almost over.

SCHODEK: The story goes, although he never talked about it, that he was drafted into the field artillery and was sent to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and ran one of the 155 millimeter howitzers. They made their way over to San Diego, shipped out and ended up sitting on a ship outside of Okinawa. But they didn't go in to shore there. They were assigned as part of the landing to the Island of Japan and fortuitously the atomic bomb was dropped and that ended that. I remember him telling us that the ship went over to one side of Korea where they unloaded the ship, got on a truck, rode on trucks across Korea to the other side, and got on another ship and came home. I don't know if you remember, but McArthur said we need to fight the Russians right now while we are in Korea while we are geared up. Apparently things were still very sensitive at that time.

BAUMGARTNER: Tremendous strife. A lot of misery for a lot of people.

SCHODEK: Some things are stuck in your memory. During the war I remember that everything was rationed. From a kid's standpoint, one of the things that were important to us when I was growing up, we had slingshots and we had rubber guns. I don't know if you know about rubber guns, with a stick twelve inches long with a handle and you had a clothespin on the end of it and you would take an inner tube and cut it cross ways and make rubber guns. To be able to find a discarded inner tube at a service station was wonderful for a kid to make new rubber guns. That was important to us.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you have siblings?

SCHODEK: I am the oldest and I had just one brother, Daniel who was four years behind me. When Mother and Dad got married in 1935 it upset the whole family because on my dad's side were devout Catholics and Mother's family were devout Protestants. The story goes in the family that for the first three years my Daddy's aunts did not speak to Mother and Daddy.

BAUMGARTNER: Where did you go to church?

SCHODEK: We went to the First Presbyterian Church which is located on Fourth Street. The building is still there, I think it is a daycare now. I remember at that time there was a Baptist Church, in the same place it is right now, a Methodist Church and there was a Catholic Church. I am sure there were other churches but we were not involved with them.

BAUMGARTNER: I assume that it was standard practice that ever Sunday you went to church.

SCHODEK: Absolutely. Everybody went to church; Sunday school particularly and everybody was involved with the church.

We did not get a television at our house before 1950 when I was probably a freshman in high school. We got a small black and white television from Sears and Roebuck.

BAUMGARTNER: Where did you live growing up?

SCHODEK: Like I said, I was born in 1937. In about 1940 a building supply company, Home Building and Lumber Company, was formed which built a house in Ward Waddell Subdivision. It's at the Corner of Avenue F and San Jacinto Street; right across the alley from Mr. and Mrs. B. D. Leaman. They were good neighbors.

BAUMGARTNER: That was Dean Leaman's father?

Editor's Note: Click this link to access Jacquelyn Leaman's (Mrs. Dean Leaman's) oral history.

SCHODEK: Yes. They were really nice people. A house and a lot, it was a wood frame, two bedroom, one bath, kitchen and little dining room and little living area and that is where we lived.

BAUMGARTNER: Did your parents rent it or did they buy it?

SCHODEK: They bought it. Late thirties, maybe 1940 or1941.

BAUMGARTNER: Would you remember what they would have paid for a house way back then?

SCHODEK: I was going to say that the next thing I remember is that they paid $3,300.00 for the house and lot. I remember that we made payments on it. We would go to the old wooden lumber company, Home Building and Lumber Company, that burned down several years ago, and in the corner of the building there was a twenty by twenty area that had a railing around it and Mr. W. W. Ward sat there behind a roll type desk. He would look at you over the top of his glasses. Mother would take me over there and we would make a $15.00 monthly payment on the house. That was something.

BAUMGARTNER: Wow. $15.00 a month. In addition to the war being a factor that was still pretty

much in the aftermath of the depression.

STARTING SCHOOL

SCHODEK: Absolutely, yes. Nobody had money. In 1943, I started the first grade. I have a vague recollection of Robert E. Lee School.

BAUMGARTNER: Over on Highway 36 in Rosenberg. Still there.

SCHODEK: I went there for four grades and then went to Jane Long Elementary in Richmond. They had an old two story building there. What I remember about it, at that time we always went barefoot, we never wore shoes.

BAUMGARTNER: Even when school started?

SCHODEK: Well this was in the fifth grade and I remember that we had always gone barefoot and when we got over to Richmond on that sandy soil over there, the cockle burs were terrible. I think we probably started wearing shoes because of the cockle bur stickers. About that time the Lamar School District was created and after Jane Long I went over to Travis School for the sixth grade, and then for the seventh and eighth grade went over to the old Rosenberg High School building on the corner of Avenue H and Eighth Street.

BAUMGARTNER: So that was around 1948 or so.

SCHODEK: That is correct. By that time the new high school, Lamar Consolidated, was constructed and I finished the four years over there. I started high school in 1951 and graduated in 1955.

BAUMGARTNER: What kind of stuff did you do growing up as a kid?

SCHODEK: The Cole Theater was in Rosenberg, north on Third Street. On the east side across the street from Pickard and Hudgins drugstore was the State Theater but we always went to the Cole Theater.

BAUMGARTNER: You had two theaters in Rosenberg? The only one I have heard of is the Cole Theater.

Child's ticket to Cole Theater

SCHODEK: I think the State Theater was maybe more Spanish-speaking. Anyway on Saturday afternoon Mother would give my brother and me each fifteen cents and we would go to the Cole Theater, nine cents to get in and a nickel for a bag of popcorn and come home with a penny change. They always had a Hopalong Cassidy or Gene Autry western movie which always had serials with some bad guy running over people with the train. It was always exciting and that was our entertainment.

BAUMGARTNER: Where did little kids play back then?

SCHODEK: We played guns a whole lot. A "BB gun" was very important and here again from the rationing standpoint that was always a big thing because as I remember the only place that I could buy BB's in Rosenberg was at the RB Department Store on Third Street. They would sell you a little cellophane package and it had about twenty BB pellets in it but they were rationed and you could only get one package. So you were very careful with the BB's plus they were not real good quality. I remember that you had to take them out of the package and roll them around a little bit and scrape all the burrs off of them.

BAUMGARTNER: It's surprising that you had BB guns with the financial constraints in place.

SCHODEK: I remember when Daddy bought me my first BB gun. It was a Daisy Red Ryder. We were at a little hardware store and they had a BB gun. The manager shot the BB gun inside the store which blew my mind at the time. He shot it up to the ceiling and didn't hit anything, and that was my BB gun and I had it for years and years.

BAUMGARTNER: I had a BB gun; I used it mostly for frog hunting and house sparrows that were pests making big messy nests in our roof gutters.

SCHODEK: Mostly sparrows. To get the money to buy the BBs, I used to run errands for a neighbor lady. A lady who lived across the alley, Mrs. Anders, apparently had terrible headaches and she would call my mother. My mother's name was Hermina Amelia but everybody called her Minnie, and Mrs. Anders would say "Minnie send your boy over." We had a telephone at that time; our number was 384. I would go over to Schaffer's drug store and would buy Mrs. Anders a powder that came in a package that folded like a stick of gum. She used it every day and I don't remember what she gave me, maybe a nickel, and then she would give me a penny. I went to the store for her too, and basically I was able to earn money running errands for her.

BAUMGARTNER: Most stores and businesses were locally owned then, weren't they?

SCHODEK: They were very small stores. We had the White House Grocery here in Rosenberg and it was run by the three Stavinoha brothers and Jodie Stavinoha who was an FBI guy and then became the Fort Bend County Judge after he retired from the FBI. The three brothers ran the meat market. I remember that in 1948 or 1949 Ben Babovec put in the Payless Grocery, which was right across the

Editor's Note: *Click this link to access Albinia Babovec's oral history interview.*

street from the Post Office. It was twice as big as any grocery store in Rosenberg,

BAUMGARTNER: Everybody knew the owners and they knew everybody?

SCHODEK: I would say that was true. But it seems like anytime we needed a tool or anything

around the house, Mother and Daddy drove us to South Main in Houston to Sears right there on Main Street. It was the biggest store in town at that time. I recall that we would drive up there in the car and they had a parking lot in back that was usually full and there was a guy in an elevated tower with a tie that would tell you what row to turn on to go park.

BAUMGARTNER: Really, my goodness. That was a big event.

SCHODEK: Mensik's was on Avenue H. And there was Luksa's Grocery Store down on Needville highway. I worked there while I was in high school.

BAUMGARTNER: What did you do?

SCHODEK: Everything. Stocking and candling eggs. Some farmers brought in their eggs and we would candle them. We sold feed by the hundred pound sack. I weighed 135 pounds and I would handle those hundred pound sacks of feed. I remember that.

BAUMGARTNER: Now explain what candling is.

SCHODEK: We would get the eggs and shine them with a light or by holding them over a candle to inspect them to make sure there was no chick inside the egg. I guess it is all done by machine today.

The store was a mom and pop. The two Luksa brothers owned the store. Mr. Ernest Luksa was the butcher and Sid Ward was in back and Julius ran the front of it. It was one of those stores at that time that offered credit. They had a 4 by 6 tablet; we would need to have a carbon paper and we had to write down milk, bread, whatever they got. At the end of the month Mr. Luksa always had to be talking to people about collecting his money.

BAUMGARTNER: I am sure that must have been a continuous process. What were you paid?

SCHODEK: I made a $1.35 an hour in 1950.

BAUMGARTNER: That was pretty good money then.

SCHODEK: He was a good man to work for; both of them were good to work for. I worked there pretty much all through high school. At that time my father was in the VA Hospital. I don't know why and I don't remember why but he was in the hospital and basically by working at Luksa's Grocery I was kind of supporting the family.

During the Second World War when daddy got drafted he was making $33.00 a month in the service and our house payment was $15.00 a month which I know he sent mother that much money. She rented out one of the bedrooms at our house to two girls and I don't have any idea what they did. Basically things were tight.

HIGH SCHOOL DAYS

SCHODEK: My high school years were just following the period when the Richmond and

Rosenberg school districts were unified. I think it was 1948 when they combined all the schools into Lamar Consolidated. For the high school yearbook, one year Guy Traylor, the high school principal, suggested that we go around and take pictures of all the school buildings in the area which were going to be folded into the new school system. For instance the one in Pleak, the one in Foster, there were a bunch of them that were to be joined together. We used them as dividers in the yearbook. So if you ever want pictures of the old schools in Fort Bend Lamar School District they are all in the 1952 yearbook.

It was during this period that we got to meet a lot of the kids in the community; in fact some of my best friends are from Richmond. We didn't know them before the schools were merged.

BAUMGARTNER: People talk about that now but it has always kind of surprised me--Richmond was just a mile away.

SCHODEK: That is right but that's the way it was.

BAUMGARTNER: What did kids do in high school? Were organized sports important?

SCHODEK: Oh yeah. I remember my earliest recollection of football. Two blocks over from where we lived was the old Rosenberg High School and the football field was there. There was only a hedge around it and they had a wooden stadium on the north side but I recall going over there and crawling through the fence and watching the Rosenberg Brahmas playing the El Campo Ricebirds. El Campo had a great running back named Glenn Lippman who was so good that when he was recruited by Texas A&M the story we heard is that he would agree to go to A&M only if three of his teammates would get scholarships with him. He took four boys with him at that time. I also got to see Ken Hall the great All American from Sugar Land when he was in his heyday. Larry Burton, Grant Roane and I, we had a 35mm camera and we would climb up these wooden telephone poles with a little perch and would film all the Sugar Land games for the Sugar Land coaches.

Editor's Note: *Click this link to acess Kenneth Hall's oral history interview.*

BAUMGARTNER: Grant Roane, is that George's son?

SCHODEK: Yes. And I played sports all through high school.

BAUMGARTNER: Did freshman get to play varsity?

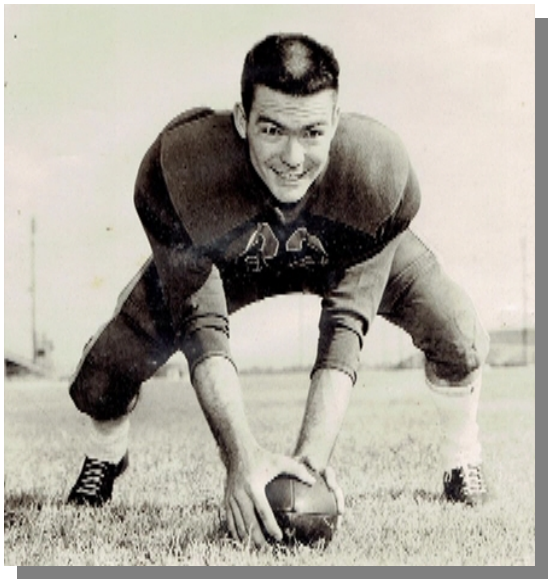
SCHODEK: I wasn't good enough to play varsity football then, I was too small. I was 135 pounds. We won District my freshman year and we had a good bunch of guys and some big boys for that time. Albert Zuckero was 250 pounds, Ben Chupik was a running back about 180 pounds, Sutton Young was the quarterback. Charles Mikeska was a guard; he was one of the neighbors that I grew up with.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you play in your sophomore, junior and senior years?

SCHODEK: Yes, I ran a little track, not too good, and I played football and baseball. It was so different then. You know nowadays you go to a football game and there are probably eight or ten coaches down on the sideline. In 1955 we had two coaches.

BAUMGARTNER: What position did you play?

SCHODEK: Center. I was 135 pounds playing center.



Franklin Schodek, 1955 Lamar Mustang

BAUMGARTNER: Center; really! Center is one of the leaders of the team. Right in the middle of the huddle, keep the guys focused. I saw your photo in the Pictorial scrapbook -- you were a co-captain of the team!

SCHODEK: Well that is true, I was. It was fun. I played because it was fun. My number was 32, this was at a time before they changed it to where the center had to be number 55 and guards' numbers were 60s and the tackles were 70s. Today every position has a designated number.

BAUMGARTNER: 32... today that would be reserved for the star running back.

SCHODEK: That's right. I remember too that at that time Albert Zuckero drove the school bus. He and his brother Victor lived up around Simonton, and they drove the bus in, brought the kids to school every morning. These guys were just students, but they drove the bus and picked up all the school kids.

BAUMGARTNER: Really. How old was he, sixteen or something?

SCHODEK: Yes. He was very mature. He was a big guy. Times have changed. Lamar CISD played El Campo, Bay City, West Columbia, Brenham, and Navasota and now look at it-- Lamar ISD is going to have five or six high schools in this area. Needville is playing El Campo, West Columbia, Bay City and all those schools. Needville is growing and Bay City and El Campo are not growing.

BAUMGARTNER: What are some differences in yesterday's schools and today's?

SCHODEK: To start off with, at the time the high school was not air conditioned. That's a big difference.

Another thing, though we did not realize it at the time, our teachers were barely older than we were. They were right out of college. They had to be just 21, 22 or 23 years old and they were our

teachers that we looked up to.

BAUMGARTNER: How capable were they?

SCHODEK: I think they were all good. As far as I can remember, they taught us what we needed to know.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you have to study much?

SCHODEK: Oh yes, it seemed like we had homework all the time, though I don't particularly remember anything about it.

BAUMGARTNER: You did not get a car in high school?

SCHODEK: Oh gosh, no. It is not like nowadays where kids have cars in high school. In fact in 1955 I think the only person in our senior class who had a car was George Henry Bernshausen and his daddy was the Conoco dealer here. He had the station right next door here.

BAUMGARTNER: How large was the school then?

SCHODEK: Our graduating class in 1955 was about a hundred. The high school was about four hundred, I would suppose.

BAUMGARTNER: That is a decent sized high school. What were the demographics like then as far as ethnic breakdown?

SCHODEK: I think we were the first class in Lamar that had over a hundred graduates. Out of that there were probably ten Hispanics. There were no black students in 1955; it was before integration. At that time there was A.W. Jackson which was a school for blacks on the north side of the tracks and I don't know what the size of the school was.

BAUMGARTNER: When did integration take place in Rosenberg, do you remember?

SCHODEK: It had to be the latter part of the sixties; I was of course out of school by then. As I remember, A.W. Jackson was a principal at the school and that is what the Lamar school district named the school after integration took place.

BAUMGARTNER: Was there any racial tension or problems in those days?

SCHODEK: No, and not around Richmond. We were just two little sleepy towns. I was in high school at that time and just observing things wasn't aware of racial problems around Fort Bend, Richmond or Rosenberg. There might have been some incidents but I wasn't aware.

BAUMGARTNER: Of course, there are two perspectives on that. In your community there were not any issues or there could have been a difference of opinion on that.

You said that church attendance was important in the community. Was there any significance placed on which church you attended or which denomination you belonged to?

SCHODEK: That was not an issue at all. All I know is that we went to the Presbyterian Church anytime we went to play volleyball, basketball or something like that. We got together with kids from the Needville church. I am still friends with Dorothy Wieghat from church who was a Novosad as I recall.

The county parade was kind of important too here in town at that time. In the school year book, we had a car in the parade in 1955.

Editor's Note: *Click this link to read more about POW camps in Texas During WW II.*

Click this link to view a photo reputedly taken at the POW camp in Rosenberg.

BAUMGARTNER: In later years I remember the parade ran through Richmond and Rosenberg and ended every year at the county fair site where Fiesta is located now.

SCHODEK: That's right. As a kid I remember when that was a concentration camp.

BAUMGARTNER: Really, on Avenue H in the middle of town?

SCHODEK: A fence was run around the fairgrounds, and I recall a guard tower up on the road. I think there were about two hundred German prisoners who I understood were captured in Africa and brought here during World War II. Charlie Macek was in charge of the food at the camp; he spoke Czech and got along with them real well. I remember Charlie saying that security was not much of a problem because if they escaped where would they go?

BAUMGARTNER: I have read that they were very well behaved and well-mannered and a number of them stayed in the states and did not go back to Germany.

SCHODEK: He said there was never a problem. About that time they also had another camp up in Hempstead I understand with six hundred people. It was a much bigger one.

At the other end of town, going through Richmond, was the Richmond Drive In; it was an old building on the south side of the highway there.

BAUMGARTNER: Right before you cross the river bridge?

SCHODEK: Yes on the right hand side. That was the Old Richmond Drive In that Johnny Hruzek ran and he had the best enchiladas in the world. What I recall about the Richmond Drive In, probably about 1946, I remember going in there with Daddy and there were slot machines in the back room. There wasn't a bunch of them, maybe four or five. They made an impression on me, I remember about that time we went to Galveston once and on the Seawall in just a regular cafe

there were slot machines.

BAUMGARTNER: What other stores do you remember around town?

SCHODEK: I remember Edelstein's Clothing Store where my Aunt Mattie Schodek worked and my Dad would always buy dresses and clothes for my mother on special occasions. I remember Raymond Rude and the reason I remember him is of course he built the first sporting goods store in Rosenberg, Rude and Sons, where you could buy a baseball glove or baseball. He was really good about promoting Little League Baseball.

BAUMGARTNER: That reminds me about shopping once at Rude's, after moving to town here. I went to buy a shotgun and I wanted to buy it from Rude and Sons rather than Walmart which had just opened up. I told Mr. Rude what I wanted and he said go to Walmart and get the model number and the price of it for me, it was a standard 12- gauge shotgun. So I went to Walmart and I came back and gave Mr. Rude the information and when I went back a few days later he told me, "I am embarrassed to tell you this but the price that you can buy it from at Walmart is cheaper than what I can buy it wholesale!"

SCHODEK: My cousin was in the farm and feed business and in fact he had a store here in Rosenberg on Highway 36 and he told me the same thing -- which Walmart was selling things for less than he could buy them for. That was a rude awakening for a lot of people.

BAUMGARTNER: I hate to say it but I guess that is the American way. Who were some of your classmates?

SCHODEK: Reggie Traylor, Biggy Bailey, Jimmy Walzel, Julius Nowak.

BAUMGARTNER: Are many of your classmates still around Rosenberg?

SCHODEK: Most of them are away or gone or only around just a little bit. I know at the last class reunion, we did not have a good turnout at all. It was our 60th.

My wife Janiece, Jean Licka in those days, was two years behind me at Lamar. She lived across the street from West Gethsemane Cemetery over off Highway 36 and Mr. Ed the bus driver picked her up in his bus every day and delivered her back home every day for twelve straight years of school! For her to be picked up and delivered home every day for twelve years is pretty remarkable.

Janiece & Franklin on their wedding day in 1960

BAUMGARTNER: Extraordinary. It couldn't happen today. When did you and Janiece marry?

SCHODEK: We met in high school and we got married in 1960 at the

Methodist Church in Rosenberg. We have three adult sons, Mark, Brad, and Ross. Mark and Vickie have three kids, Casey, Cisco and Sheldon. Casey is married to Neal Drabek. Brad and Stacey also have three, Will, Lindsey and Joseph, and they are all going to the University of Texas, right now today. Will is a computer geek and is going to UT Austin, Joseph is a computer geek and he is going to UT Arlington and Lindsey is going to nursing school in El Paso.

BAUMGARTNER: Boy that is some bucks on college tuition.

SCHODEK: Mark's daughter Cisco is going to the University of Houston and Sheldon is going to Wharton Junior College and Casey and Neal have a little boy by the name of Lane, he is about three or four years old. So we are great grandparents. I tell Janiece that she is a great grandmother and I am not a great grandfather. It makes you feel old when you say you are a great grandfather. I remember when I thought thirty five was old.

BAUMGARTNER: I wanted to talk to you a little bit about your brother, Daniel, because I remember when I saw his obituary a few years ago. It was so noteworthy that he was at Harvard. It really jumped out at me.

SCHODEK: He was a tenured professor there.

BAUMGARTNER: Which is remarkable when you think of the incredible amount of people in the United States of America who would aspire to be a professor at Harvard University. It is unbelievably competitive. It is at the top. What was his background?

SCHODEK: Daniel Lewis was born in late August of the year and consequently when he went to school he was very young for his age; when he got to be in high school apparently everything clicked and he started doing real well. He graduated here at Lamar and after that he went to Texas Lutheran the first year and the second year he went with Charles Wicke from East Bernard over to UT Arlington. The third and fourth year he transferred over to UT Austin. Following graduation he got a Doctor's degree from M.I.T. in Massachusetts and became a professor at Harvard. This was without any funding. He was working on scholarships all the way through. He mentioned one time that at UT he took as an elective a Greek Drama course completely out of the engineering field and he made a B in it. That was the worst grade he had in the whole college career [chuckle]. He did real well in college.

BAUMGARTNER: Did he have any particular educational stimulation from your parents?

SCHODEK: No, my daddy was a plumber, electrician, and could do just about anything with his hands and mother was a homemaker. To answer your question, he did it all on his own.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you ever think about why he was so inspired and so capable? It just struck me as being so unusual coming from a little place like Rosenberg. I guess it happens all the time all over the country; people leave a small town and go to the big city.

SCHODEK: He was just a nice guy as far as being a brother and he never really was trying to impress anybody with his education or anything. He married Dr. Elizabeth Kay Streiber and they had two boys, Ned an attorney in New York City, and Ben, a landscaper.

BAUMGARTNER: What did he teach at Harvard?

SCHODEK: Architectural engineering. One time they had a contest in the state of New Hampshire to design a covered bridge of some sort and he and one of his architect colleagues there at Harvard submitted a proposal and they won. The people from New Hampshire felt those guys from Boston shouldn't win so they changed the contest and basically the parameters of it, and he won again.

BAUMGARTNER: Do you think there was any possible correlation between your interest in design and engineering in your surveying career, and his interest in architectural engineering as a field of study?

SCHODEK: I don't remember; Daniel was four years younger than me.

BAUMGARTNER: That is pretty interesting. I remember seeing it the paper and I though wow. I don't know if anybody else reads the paper [both laughing].

LEAVING FOR CALIFORNIA

BAUMGARTNER: After high school graduation what did you do?

SCHODEK: Well, I had decided I wanted to be an industrial designer. At that time there were two options--to go to either Syracuse, New York or Los Angeles, California. I decided to go to Los Angeles.

BAUMGARTNER: That was pretty unusual wasn't it, to want to major in that and go to LA to college?

SCHODEK: I guess. Of course all my friends, Johnny Cabiness, Nesbitt Cumings, and all of them were going to Sam Houston, and T J Cegelski was going to A&M, and Reggie and Biggy were going to the University of Texas, but for one reason or another I just had it in my mind that I wanted to design stuff.

BAUMGARTNER: What is an industrial designer?

SCHODEK: It is like designing cars or designing structures or anything that you build.

BAUMGARTNER: Why did you have an interest in that? Did you like doodling in high school?

SCHODEK: Yes, at the time. I took mechanical drawing in high school.

BAUMGARTNER: What is mechanical drawing?

SCHODEK: Basically drawing or designing house plans, that type of stuff. Drafting, creating preliminary sketches. There were math skills involved. At that time everything was drawn by hand but of course since then the computer age has taken over. To apply to school we had to send in a whole bunch of drawings. I got accepted and Daddy and Mother drove out there with me and we found me a place to stay. After returning home, later in the summer I was able to catch a train from here in Rosenberg and return to Los Angeles. Caught a taxi there and made it to the rooming house and there I was.

BAUMGARTNER: What were classes like? Was it mostly men?

SCHODEK: Yes it was. The classes had probably forty or fifty people. They were basically all drawing classes of one sort or another.

BAUMGARTNER: Was it a four year school?

SCHODEK: Supposed to be. I finished the first year without any problems and started the second year but I didn't have any money. I met a business owner on a part time job who wanted to build a race track in Riverside, California. I did a bunch of little drawings for him; one thing led to another and before long me and a helper were out there staking it out and designing a race track. I had worked for Fort Bend County Drainage one summer when Stanley Kucherka was in charge and Johnny Pustka was my boss; that was before Johnny became County Commissioner. I knew how to run the level and the transit on a construction site.

Editor's Note: *Click this link to access Stanley Kucherka's oral history interview*.

BAUMGARTNER: Who was the helper?

SCHODEK: I had a helper that was an onion picker from Arkansas who had moved out to California to pick onions and he didn't know how to read or write. Have you ever worked with anybody that didn't know how to read or write?

It was kind of a fun time, but I had run out of money to go to school and I needed to come home. So I left there and came back to Texas. While I was out there I had bought my first car. A 1947 Ford Convertible. $250.00. I closed my bank account with $25.00 in it and got in the car and thirty six hours later I wound up in Rosenberg. I was so tired and so sleepy I got lost in Eagle Lake. It is a wonder that I didn't have a wreck coming home.

BAUMGARTNER: You were about twenty then, right?

SCHODEK: About twenty.

RETURNING HOME

I finally got back and began looking for some place to work. I did some work in Houston, freeway construction. I ran into an old friend at church, Mrs. Gusty Lee Lenert, who was secretary for the Drainage District and she mentioned that Henry Steinkamp might be interested in hiring someone.

I went and talked to Mr. Steinkamp, in a tiny little ten by ten room in a small brick insurance office on Avenue H. There was a drafting table and a desk.

BAUMGARTNER: So you went to work for Mr. Steinkamp?

SCHODEK: For Henry then, that was about 1958.

BAUMGARTNER: What did you do?

SCHODEK: Drafting.

BAUMGARTNER: So employment with Henry was consistent with your background, and the California experience benefited you as a job foundation?

SCHODEK: I would say so. Absolutely.

BAUMGARTNER: Would it have done you much good to stay longer in school?

SCHODEK: I probably would have taken a different course. If I would have graduated I would have gone in some different direction and I know that.

BAUMGARTNER: Like what?

SCHODEK: Probably in some design area. I think completely different, maybe with some company that designed computers or something basically in design.

BAUMGARTNER: You might have stayed out there and your whole life would be different.

SCHODEK: I would think so.

BAUMGARTNER: So I would say that you benefited by coming back home, but course that reflects my opinion of Rosenberg versus California. Life takes its funny turns, a lot of it's a flip of a coin and your whole life is transformed.

What was Henry Steinkamp like to work for? You worked for him for over twenty years.

SCHODEK: He was very good to work for and I always said he was one the smartest men I know. Basically he was good at analyzing things. He was a problem solver. He used to do the crossword puzzle in the paper every day, top to bottom. He liked to get a problem and work on it and work on

it. Once he got the solution he was done with it. He would say, "Go ahead and draw it up, and I will sign it."

BAUMGARTNER: He was both a surveyor and an engineer?

SCHODEK: He graduated from Texas A&M in about 1946 and came to Rosenberg and worked for the Soil Conservation Service; he was an engineer over there. When he was there, they did what they called a soil survey map of Fort Bend County. Basically they got aerial photographs and they identified this is a black land soil and this is sandy soil and this is the red soil and so forth.

BAUMGARTNER: I have seen those maps. They are still in use; the soil survey is still used all the time.

SCHODEK: We outgrew that little office and he rented a house over here on Fifth Street. It was just an old wood frame house. I think we had two or three field crews at that time, basically an instrument man and two chainmen.

So we outgrew that too and Mr. Steinkamp and Mr. Nelson Bass built a metallic office building at 1117 Tobola Street which is still there. That was in the late 1970's, I guess. What was interesting about that was that we had four different businesses located there. Steinkamp had the back of the building, which was about twenty feet by thirty feet. There was an office which attorney Andrew Briscoe occupied. There was an office for Red Miller, the businessman and owner of the Texas Grill. And Raymond Chachere had his insurance agency on the other side.

BAUMGARTNER: Who constructed it?

CHODEK: Nelson Bass did.

BAUMGARTNER: Bobby Bass's dad?

Editor's Note: *Click this link to access Bob Bass's oral history interview*.

SCHODEK: Yes. We had one secretary, Maxine Dickehut, and she took care of all the typing for everybody. For there not to be problems of any sort is just amazing with four separate companies there. All I can say is that Steinkamp was a Texas A&M Aggie, Nelson was an Aggie, Mr. Briscoe was an Aggie, and Raymond was Sam Houston State so everybody just got along.

BAUMGARTNER: When did Henry retire?

SCHODEK: 1983 or 1984, somewhere along in there, early eighties. James Syptak and myself built this building here for our office; Henry was already out of it. We just kept the name. I remember at the time that we were going to change the business name but the attorneys wanted five thousand dollars to change the name and we never did.

BAUMGARTNER: Is name recognition important in surveying?

SCHODEK: So much of our work is from recommendations; it seemed to me that it did not make a difference.

BAUMGARTNER: What are some ways the surveying business has changed since you entered it in 1958?

SCHODEK: The thing is that surveying has changed so much. That was before GPS. Back in 1960 when I first started, field work was like you were basically getting in a jungle. At that time we did a lot of brush cutting. Going through heavy Yaupon thickets and stuff like that. Nowadays with the GPS you can go around these palmettos more than chest high and through water eighteen inches deep.

Editor's Note: *Click this link to read more about the Global Positioning System, or GPS.*

Surveying required measuring angles and measuring distances. With angles, basically at the time we were working with an instrument called a theodolite which we could measure an angle within one second. Basically working with angles is all triangles, it is nothing but triangles. For measuring distances, we were measuring with a steel tape at that time, a two hundred foot steel tape. This was all way before GPS.

BAUMGARTNER: Was it demanding physically?

SCHODEK: Today most of the kids in high school like computers. They are not interested in doing work on the ground and getting their hands dirty. In the 1980's every May we would have several kids from high school that would come by looking for a job as a chainman. We have not had an application in probably thirty years.

We have talked to many people and young people are not interested in this business. And they have really tightened up the academic qualifications nowadays. Back at the time that I got registered you could work in the field for six years progressively improving your skills. You progressively had to increase your responsibility. Then you took a test; I took a two day test and passed it. Nowadays you have thirty two hours of certain courses in college.

BAUMGARTNER: How does somebody get a license?

SCHODEK: Eventually you still have to work for somebody for a certain period; I think it is still five or six years. Then you can take your test to become a licensed Registered Professional Land Surveyor.

BAUMGARTNER: Is that a defined class?

SCHODEK: It is like an architect or an engineer; basically it says that you have fulfilled the

requirements and are going to do a certain quality of work and that there are certain things that you are not going to do. It is a process to upgrade the profession.

We have to attend twelve hours of continuous education every year to learn what is the latest development. The business is very competitive and there is always somebody that tries to cut your throat. Basically we will do a survey for a thousand dollars but this guy will do it for eight hundred dollars. I have attended all these continuous educational classes and it is just a bunch of gray haired men there now.

Our work is now entirely done with the GPS. All of my life I had dealt with measuring angles and measuring distances with a distance meter. When this GPS stuff came out it was just mind boggling. You have objects floating around out there in space that are able to tell you where you are anywhere on the face of the earth. When I first started out it was possible to identify a point within ten or fifteen feet; then it became better and better; and now it is three eighth of an inch! Depends on how many satellites that you can pick up; if you have a minimum of six satellites you can get within three eighths of an inch.

And basically the other part of it that has changed is the documentation. Surveying requires that you do a lot of research and that you read a lot of deeds. Doing a boundary survey on an old tract of land that was last surveyed in 1910--- it is almost like patchwork, it's like a jigsaw puzzle.

Back in 1958 we required maps and maps and maps. There is not an area in Fort Bend County that we can go to that we have not been to before. We have a wealth of information and it is probably a million dollars' worth of information stored back there.

BAUMGARTNER: In your files here in the office?

SCHODEK: Yes. But today we could not sell it for five thousand dollars.

BAUMGARTNER: Why?

SCHODEK: Dianne Wilson, the former County Clerk, brought the Fort Bend County Clerk System up to the computer generation standards. Back in 1980 if we wanted a copy of a deed, we would fill out a request and maybe a week later we would get that copy from the County Clerk's Office. Now it is all on the computer, twenty four hours a day, call up anything you want, anytime. The research is all there, whatever is recorded.

Editor's Note: *Click this link to access Dianne Wilson's oral history interview*.

BAUMGARTNER: How did they get all that data?

SCHODEK: Any deed that you take up there and record it is there forever.

BAUMGARTNER: A real estate property transaction takes place and is entered into the computer and once it is there it is there forever. There have been lots of changes. Did your son Brad used to work here with you in the old days?

SCHODEK: Brad went over to Kelly Kaluza's office. They are busy and do a lot of engineering work. Brad is in a good place over there.

BAUMGARTNER: Kelly Kaluza and Associates. Is Kelly still working?

SCHODEK: He sold his business; I think he retired effective October 1st,

BAUMGARTNER: I had heard he sold it to Llarence Turner. How old is Brad now?

SCHODEK: Middle age, about 45-48. He has three kids in college right now, so he has to work. He enjoys it and has more advanced skills than I. He has a bigger basis in background and more skills with the computers.

BAUMGARTNER: I look at the way that young people train in school today and it just seems so much more sophisticated than anything that we did. But I still hear griping that schools today are not good enough, math level is too low, etcetera.

SCHODEK: You know what bothers me is that in the lower grades they do not teach cursive writing anymore. They do not have the fundamentals

BAUMGARTNER: So what does an engineer do?

SCHODEK: Basically water and sewer and streets and paving, things like that. Essentially it is the infrastructure. The surveying part of the engineering business is getting together all the information, as far as elevations of drain lines, and exiting lines and everything like that. The engineer designs whatever is going to fit within the matrixes of all these other things.

Elevations are a major factor. Nowadays what has become so important is the elevation of a house. There are so many houses that were built in an area where they shouldn't have got a permit to build in the first place.

BAUMGARTNER: It would seem like Hurricane Harvey would have increased demand for surveyors.

SCHODEK: It exposed a big weakness in a lot of applications.

BAUMGARTNER: Franklin, you and your partner James Syptak have been working together for many years. What do you and James focus on now?

SCHODEK: Basically land surveying. Say somebody is buying a house and it has an existing deed,

maybe a house and five acres out in the country. In order to borrow money and get a mortgage, they need to have a survey. We basically do the survey and may also provide an elevation certificate, which lenders require due to flooding considerations.

BAUMGARTNER: So you have a land crew that you send out?

SCHODEK: Yes. We use a contract land surveyor. Someone that we have good faith in that he is going to do it accurately. For the guys we are using, in order to set up a GPS operation today would require about a hundred thousand dollars. That's for the equipment and also the computer stuff that goes along with it. Typically the equipment that he uses is from previous assignments with big oil companies. He is likely to have done a lot of seismograph work and stuff like that.

BAUMGARTNER: You mean this independent contractor would have a hundred thousand dollars' worth of equipment?

SCHODEK: That is why you do not see a lot of people going into the surveying business.

One of my very good friends, T. J. Cegelski, he knew me better than anyone else, he used to say that I think like an engineer, draw like an architect but charge like a surveyor. He says you are never going to make much money but you are going to enjoy what you do and he was pretty much right.

COMMUNITY CHANGES

BAUMGARTNER: Your business has changed dramatically. You said earlier that Rosenberg and Richmond were sleepy little towns. How has the community really started to change over the years?

SCHODEK: It's interesting to look at how much the political structure has changed. The Jaybird Party was still strong in 1951. Hilmar Moore was the Mayor and also chairman or president of the Jaybird Association at that time.

Editor's Note: *Click this link to read more about the Jaybird-Woodpecker War.*

They had $1500.00 in funds they had accumulated through the Jaybird Association, and I think it was at a City Council meeting in Richmond that they shut down the Jaybird Association and donated that money to a charitable association. Winona Wright was the City Secretary for the City of Richmond at that time and was also the secretary for the Jaybird Association. Before 1951, from what I understand, if you were not in the Jaybird Association and you ran for public office, you did not get elected. That went from 1889 to 1951 or 1952.

BAUMGARTNER: You know what is amazing is that Hilmar was already mayor back then when you were a young teenager. Sixty three years in office, that is remarkable. With Hilmar, Richmond had a stable government for all that time; what were your impressions of Rosenberg politicians? How was Mr. Babovec as mayor?

SCHODEK: The different mayors were all good people. You are talking about Ben Babovec, Lupe Uresti, James Raines, they were all real honest people and they wanted to do a good job for the city.

BAUMGARTNER: Would you say there is a kind of a change of attitude in the way politics is regarded now compared to then?

SCHODEK: One thing I note now is when you go to one of these city council meetings, everybody wants to talk about everything. Mayor Moore was a classic for having a fifteen minute city council meeting. Of course they only had two commissioners and the mayor ran a real tight ship and wham bam thank you ma'am and they are done. But nowadays you go to these city council meetings, and they start at seven and if they are over by midnight you are doing good. Everybody thinks they have to say something about ever subject that comes up.

BAUMGARTNER: What about their dedication and interest in the city?

SCHODEK: In those days I think these were all good people. For the most part, the same thing for the County. For instance you couldn't want a better person than County Judge Jodie Stavinoha. Really good people, looking after the best interests of the county. In 1950 they were still using the old jail and I think the whole sheriff's department was thirty five people, including all the deputies. There was one man that took care of the jail then.

BAUMGARTNER: That was for the entire county.

SCHODEK: They used radios at that time from the county sheriff's office to contact deputies out in the field. I always understood that around Blue Ridge in Missouri City there was a power pole that had a telephone on it that went toward Kendleton. They would call their deputies to go to that telephone pole to find out where they were supposed to go in case there was a wreck or something. As I remember it the State Highway Department had two troopers stationed in Fort Bend County who covered the whole county. Now I think there are probably seven hundred people working for the Sheriff's Department in the jail and probably another seven hundred on the streets in the service areas. That part of it is just mind boggling it has changed so much.

Rosenberg really did not change until they started talking about extending the Southwest Freeway. In 1963 the Southwest Freeway went only to Sugar Land at Highway 6 and that was the end of it right there. They had been acquiring right of way but it did not change until the freeway got built in the early 1970's.

BAUMGARTNER: What about housing and population growth in the area?

SCHODEK: There's been a steady demand for houses. Normal progression that you would expect.

After the Second World War, city expansion came from what they called Additions. If you take the west side of Rosenberg –Allen Street, George Street for example-- basically the city actually developed the lots in these additions and sold the lots to builders who built houses. A lot of time those were "spec houses," that is homes under construction that didn't have a purchaser lined up yet.

COMMUNITY HISTORICAL PROJECTS

BAUMGARTNER: What are some community historical activities that you have been involved with?

SCHODEK: I've been involved with The Fort Bend Museum Association since the early 1980's I guess. I was there and I was on the Board of Directors when we hired Michael Moore to run it in 1984. That was one of the best things the museum ever did as far as I was concerned. He was a take-charge guy and he was right out of college, and he was gung ho. He was the right person at the right time and he was underpaid and volunteered and worked for a little bit of nothing as I remember. He was there for almost twenty years, it seems like. He guided the museum to its development.

> Editor's Note: The Fort Bend Museum Association went through a rebranding transition a few years ago. *Click this link to see their Web site and learn more about the organization*.

BAUMGARTNER: I believe the museum was chartered in 1967 but got opened up in the early 1970's. When did they build the museum, the facility there on Houston Street?

SCHODEK: It was after they got the Moore family to give them the rest of the block. The John Moore family gave them the Moore House and the rest of the whole block. That was a big deal.

> Editor's Note: *Click this link to access Jack Hutchins Moore's oral history interview in which he recounts the Moore family's history and the Fort Bend Museum*.

SCHODEK: They cut out a little section out of the block just the size for the museum. At first it was just a framed building. I know James Powell was the one behind all of that and I guess probably Mr. Joe Wessendorff. A little later on they finished it out making it into a museum. That is about the time that Michael Moore came in setting up the exhibits and things like that.

BAUMGARTNER: Michael was instrumental in getting these done?

SCHODEK: It would not have happened if it wouldn't have been for him. Also getting the Jane Long House and other property moved and put in over there.

Editor's Note: Jane Herbert Wilkinson Long (1798-1880) was a famous Texas pioneer, best known as the "Mother of Texas." She owned a boarding house and a plantation in Richmond. Jane Long Elementary School located in Richmond was named in her honor, and she is buried in the Morton Cemetery there. *Click here to read more about Jane Long.*

SCHODEK: It was a house that Jane Long owned but I don't think she ever lived in it. It was in a different location in Richmond and they were going to tear it down but basically got it moved over there and set up as part of the display there.

BAUMGARTNER: Who were other people on the board and prominent civic people that were interested in the museum and making it work and making it go?

SCHODEK: There were always certain key people on and off the board like Jack Moore, Billie Wendt, and Virginia Scarborough. I was the treasurer for a while. They had lots and lots of meetings and committees and finally it wore me out.

Editor's Note: *Click this link to find oral history interviews with Jack Moore, Bille Wendt, and Virginia Scarborough*.

BAUMGARTNER: When did they get involved with the George Ranch operation?

SCHODEK: It was during Michael Moore's time that they started the activity out at the George Ranch. He initiated the Texian Market Days every October.

BAUMGARTNER: That is quite an achievement. What was the objective of that?

SCHODEK: He was responsible for it. Basically it was to promote the Fort Bend heritage. It got going on a smaller level; it seems like the first couple Texian Market Days were held in downtown Richmond, but then it got bigger so we moved it out to the ranch. Every October the Fort Bend County Museum Association puts on a three day "living history event" festival, held at the George Ranch Historical Park. It has original era interpreters in costumes, historic home tours, cowboys and so forth. It's grown to a couple thousand attendees daily during the festival.

The George Foundation was responsible for overseeing management of the 25,000 acre George Ranch and Michael worked for the Museum Association. He was kind of a liaison; they worked out a contract between the museum and the George Ranch for these different areas covering the liabilities, insurance and all those other things involved.

BAUMGARTNER: How did the museum and the George Ranch produce the different exhibits and events that developed?

SCHODEK: Michael was the one who made it happen. He's moved on but he is still around. You should interview him. His wife, Sharon is a veterinarian and they bought the veterinary clinic in town from Dr. McDonald, Pat and Dan McDonald's dad.

The outcome for the Museum was good and they do have a nice facility. The original exhibits have no doubt been changed or added to since then. I do not know who the Director of the Museum is right now.

BAUMGARTNER: Claire Rogers is the Director and she is also treasurer of the Fort Bend County Historical Commission. I was involved with the Museum Association for several years and they had some real good leadership serving as Presidents then: Joe Bonham, Pat Hebert, Bill Zemanek, Joe D. Robinson, Steve Metzenthin…

SCHODEK: I know that they are some dedicated people, I can say that. The Railroad Museum was another historical civic effort that was taking place about the same time frame as the Fort Bend County Museum Association.

BAUMGARTNER: How did it get started?

SCHODEK: My recollection is that Larry Waggoner, an attorney for Fort Bend County, and Travis Reese were the ramrods. They held the first meetings in Waggoner's office in the old courthouse. It

Editor's Note: *Click this link to access Travis Reese's oral history interview*.

had to be the early 1980's I would say. Basically they were trying to develop a railroad museum showing the importance of the railroad in the economic development of the city and its role in the community.

It was just always a major presence in town. I was raised over here on San Jacinto Street which was just two blocks off it, and I spent a lot of time as a kid throwing rocks at the railroad. This was a time when the steam engines came by they would spray off all the steam and we would usually get out to the side and get the engineer to blow the whistle and they would spray you with the steam. We were over on Old Richmond Road so we were far enough from the tracks that it did not hurt. It was all steam engines in those days.

BAUMGARTNER: Travis Reese was real involved from the beginning?

SCHODEK: He would have been the primary mover. Travis had taught Vocational Ag at Lamar for many years and then went into real estate and became very involved in philanthropy for the City. It is no telling how much money that man has given to the museum.
Working with the Railroad Company to get that property was a big deal. The City of Rosenberg had a public works building back there at the site that's used today for the museum, and in fact

they had water well there in the 1930's. At first we got just a little corner for the Museum; it was just half of what is there now. The City of Rosenberg had about an acre there and we got everything from there out to Third Street.

The City has had many fund raisers to get it going and sustain it. I know there was a big fund raiser at that time just to acquire the locomotive and move it over and set it up. The George Foundation had it out at the ranch and they gave it to the Railroad Museum.

BAUMGARTNER: Do you think that it has contributed to the rebirth of the old Rosenberg Downtown area? Some people around town believe that.

SCHODEK: I don't really know. It is oriented to the young kids and attracts a lot of visitors.

BAUMGARTNER: It certainly has become important as a tourist center.

Editor's Note: *Pictorial Richmond* is out of print and copies are hard to find. The Genealogical and Local History Department of the George Memorial Library in Richmond has a reference copy.

Another important area of historical interest in the community in about the same time frame was the Sesquicentennial and the Richmond Pictorial project. I know you played a major role in that. How did you get involved?

SCHODEK: The Richmond Sesquicentennial celebration occurred in 1987, commemorating the history of the City of Richmond, 1837-1987. That was a big deal for Richmond. They started talking about the Sesquicentennial committee in some of the first meetings in 1984, and decided that since Rosenberg, Missouri City, and Sugar Land were going to have books for the Sesquicentennial, then Richmond needed to make a book. So that is when I got involved.

I ended up as President of the committee. We had many, many meetings. Basically, for the book we gathered and sorted through every old photograph to be found going back to before the turn of the century.

BAUMGARTNER: How did you collect the incredible photographs?

SCHODEK: Dedicated people. Martha Payton and Virginia Scarborough. They knew everybody in town. And we had lots of publicity in the newspaper and around town. We spread the news... "We are having a meeting of the pictorial committee and do you have any old pictures?"

Editor's Note: *Click this link to access Martha Payton's oral history interview.*

BAUMGARTNER: There are an incredible number of pictures in the book. I think it is a wonderful

book. It exhibits the entire history of Richmond with photos going back into the early 1900's and even earlier. They are referenced in the table of contents including bridges and flooding events, old businesses, schools and class photos, churches, sports teams… lots of "People and Places."

SCHODEK: When we first started, it was going to be a book to put on the coffee table. It would not require a lot of reading; it was going to be a lot of great pictures. People would bring in pictures and we would copy them. I had to make a trip over to Sugar Land to a guy who showed me I had to buy a copy stand; I had a pretty decent camera with a good lens and I needed a copy stand so we could copy the pictures and give the originals back to whoever owned them. That was a big deal then to be able to do that. Of course this was before colored pictures; it is all black and white.

BAUMGARTNER: Who else was involved in the pictorial? It was kind of broken up into eras and different subjects to try and collate the pictures. Who figured all of that out?

Richmond Pictorial Committee. Front row: Sharon Scopel, Carolyn Barnes, Chairwoman, and Martha Payton. Second row: John Grillo, Franklin Schodek, Janice Prowell, Virginia Scarborough and Gene Schulz. Not pictured Stephen Doggett.
— Courtesy San Miguel Photography

SCHODEK: It was a committee thing. There is a picture towards the front, there were six or seven of us and we used to meet over at Carolyn Barnes' house on Saturday morning. She is married to Judge Ronald Pope now.

BAUMGARTNER: The members of the Pictorial committee, just reading that page, are Sharon Scopel, Carolyn Barnes (Chairwoman), Martha Payton, John Grillo, yourself, Janice Prowell, Virginia Scarborough Gene Schulz, and Stephen Doggett.

SCHODEK: Martha Ansel Payton is related to Diz and Bert Ansel. That is the Ansel Family that had a Western Auto where the courthouse is right now.

Janice Ransom Prowell is married to Jim Powell. Ransom is an "Old Three Hundred" family name from the original Steven F. Austin settler's colony. Jim Powell was Joe C. Wessendorff's right hand man for the longest time; he did a lot around Richmond.

John Grillo was on the pictorial selection committee, provided a lot of the pictures and photography. He and Sharon Scopel grew up in Richmond.

Stephen Doggett is an attorney and he has been involved with the museum a long time.

BAUMGARTNER: His wife Meredith taught my daughter in the first grade and Jaclyn still

remembers her as her favorite teacher. Every now and then we will see them at the Museum's Lone Star Stomp activity or some affair and Jaclyn will squeal with delight. Meredith is always pleased to see a student from many years ago.

SCHODEK. Gene Schultz ...she was a teacher here in the Lamar School District. In fact, I never had her for a class but she was a teacher when I was there.

There is also a picture right at the first of the book of all the volunteers who were pretty much the ones involved throughout the entire project.

Richmond Sesquicentennial Committee. Front row: Jack Moore, Sharon Scopel, Carolyn Barnes, Martha Payton, Alice Dawson. Second row: Mary Jane Kocurek, Orin Covell, Franklin Schodek, Rosemary Buddecke and Virginia Scarborough. Third row: Mildred Walker, Chairwoman, John Grillo, Janice Prowell, Roland Adamson, Marsellaise Hall, Frances Garza, Hilmar Moore, Gene Schulz. Not pictured Frances Pittman, Keith Crawford, Willie Ann McColloch, Esther Beard, and Will Fortune.

— Courtesy San Miguel Photography

BAUMGARTNER: Yes, there is a group photo of Richmond Sesquicentennial Committee with a listing of members' names:

> Jack Moore, Sharon Scopel, Carolyn Barnes, Martha Payton, Alice Dawson, Mary Jane Kocurek, Orin Covell, Franklin Schodek, Rosemary Buddecke, Virginia Scarborough, Mildred Walker (Chairwoman), John Grillo, Janice Prowell, Roland Adamson, Marsellaise Hall, Frances Garza, Hilmar Moore, Gene Schultz

SCHODEK: The first printing was fifteen hundred books, I believe. It had a big old shield on the cover, it is actually the flag of Richmond, a big old colorful thing; but when we went back and did five hundred more prints they did not spend that extra money to do that. John Grillo was involved with doing it.

BAUMGARTNER: The book is really neat and it is unbelievably exhaustive as far as the photos.

SCHODEK: Like I said Rosenberg had one, Missouri City had one, Sugar Land had one. This book is really special in my opinion. It covered the city.

Here's the photos of police chiefs, the mayors, over the years.

BAUMGARTNER: Tiny Gaston, names like that I have heard about for years.

SCHODEK: Here is a picture of Walter Minkowitz, Richmond City Secretary for years; he was an old man when I first remember him. The old swimming pool right there by City Hall is closed today; I went swimming there many times. The city shut it down. I notice the date on it was 1939,

so it was an old pool.

You can see where people had written on some of these old photos the names of who the people were, trying to identify these people. I remember one of the problems was that we had a hard time finding any pictures of the African American residents. They just didn't spend the money then I guess to buy pictures.

The ladies on that committee were unbelievable workers. Virginia Scarborough and Martha Payton have been to several cemeteries. I know Morton Cemetery for one; they went grave to grave writing down and recording details on the tombstone. It was unbelievable. The cemetery was named after Old Austin 300 pioneer immigrant William Morton who was awarded a league of land right in that area. As I recall, he got swept away in a flood in the Brazos River in 1826 or 1827 somewhere along there and he was never found.

BAUMGARTNER: And over the years it became a cemetery for civic leaders and other citizens.

SCHODEK: You know, Jane Long, who was known as "The Mother of Texas" is buried there. Mirabeau Lamar, the second President of Texas, is buried there.

BAUMGARTNER: This must have been an interesting project. You probably learned quite a bit from doing this about the history of the area. It is very educational.

SCHODEK: No doubt about it. What you are looking at is basically a historical record. If you just stop and go through this book you would have a pretty good feeling on how Richmond was at one time, and how it has evolved over the years.

BAUMGARTNER: Also it is a pretty lengthy time frame and it goes back a lot of years. Here's one of the 1900 flood.

SCHODEK: Here is the Polly Ryon Hospital in 1960, but when you go over there today it has two towers. It was built around 1950 and very small, I think less than 50 beds.

These pictures are a group of Jane Long School students in 1934. To be able to identify this many people from these old photos was amazing. This is a personal thing but I just love black and white pictures.

Here's one of these old school buses that couldn't have had more than eight seats; they called it a sardine can in 1942 [both laughing]. In 1942 here is bus driver Frank Teykl in a Needville bus. The kids from Needville went to Richmond in high school and that was one of the reasons that Richmond had a good football team. In the 1940's they had pretty good teams.

BAUMGARTNER: They brought some of those big farm boys in. This book is pretty nifty and kind of makes me wish I grew up around here and knew more about the background of anything. There are some things to be said about being able to reside where you grew up. It may not be for everybody but it is nice.

We are winding down here. Looking back on everything, which would you say is a better or more advantageous time to live in, today or the old days? How would contrast them if you had a preference?

SCHODEK: Thinking back, like I said earlier during my life there are three things that stand out to me.

The first one is when I was a kid we were raised during the World War II era and that is the time I remember, and how fortunate it has been in our lifetime since then that we have not had a war situation. I was so thankful that they got it worked out because my three boys did not have to worry about the draft since it was replaced by the volunteer Army. And I had sweated the draft too when I was eligible.

Secondly, when my daddy was drafted then he was thirty five years old and it created a real hardship on the family.

Third thing was polio was eradicated, erased. Like I said, it was such a scary disease. I am worried about it now with all these immigrants coming in, whether they might bring some of these old diseases back into the area.

To me there were those three negative things but the rest of it, I guess you have to say, is progress. The modern conveniences, air conditioning and lots of places to eat, computers, nice televisions and radios and all of these nice features. And if you decide you want to go to England you make up your mind and you go and spend a week over there. You can do pretty much anything that you want to do right now. That has been a big change. At that time in 1955 when I went off to college in Los Angeles I got on a train here in Rosenberg and it took me two days to get there. Nowadays you wouldn't think about getting in your car and driving over there. There are opportunities to work any place in the world if you wanted to. You could do just pretty much whatever you make up your mind you want to do. The opportunities are endless, you know.

BAUMGARTNER: Yes. And you and Janiece have created good groundwork for opportunity for your three sons and your grandchildren. Thank you very much; I enjoyed it and it is interesting. It always is interesting and fun to kick things around from fifty years out.

End of Interview