

# FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

## *ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE*

Interviewee: **Jacquelyn Spencer Leaman**

Interview Date: 11/04/2010

Interviewer: Roberta Terrell

Transcriber: Carlos Rubalcaba

Location: Richmond, Texas

14 Pages



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*Transcript*

TERRELL: First thing I liked to do is get a little family history. When and where were you born?

LEAMAN: I was born in Houston, in 1925, at Saint Joseph's Hospital. My parents lived in Simonton. My dad had come to Simonton with his family from Kansas in 1901. My mother had come with her family from Illinois to Wharton County in 1910. They met through mutual friends in Wharton County.

TERRELL: Do you have siblings?

LEAMAN: I have no siblings.

TERRELL: Tell me about your early childhood. In the absence of siblings, with whom did you play?

LEAMAN: I had cousins, a boy who was older than me, and a girl who was younger than me. They lived in San Antonio, but they came to my grandmother's house and spent a lot of time there. I had them to play with, and then I had boys and girls in Simonton. We all started school together, at the Simonton School, in the first grade. There were seven of us that were all the same age that started together.

TERRELL: Was it a one-room schoolhouse?

LEAMAN: No, it was the schoolhouse that's on FM1093 now. It was a two-story schoolhouse that was built, I think, in 1926. I just gave an interview to a young man who is interested in the school because he's trying to get a historical marker for it.



*Simonton School, Simonton, Texas, was built in 1926. Classrooms were on the first floor, with an auditorium, stage, dressing rooms and kitchen above. The facility also hosted community dances, church services, elections, suppers, and home canning during the Great Depression. The building remains on its original site on FM 1093.*

We had six grades in Simonton. First and second grade were in the same room, third and fourth grade were in the same room, fifth and sixth grade were in the same room.

There were three rooms and then there was an upstairs, which served as a community auditorium and kind of the community gathering place. Any time there was any activity, it was in the upstairs of the school.

TERRELL: Were there activities centered on the church?

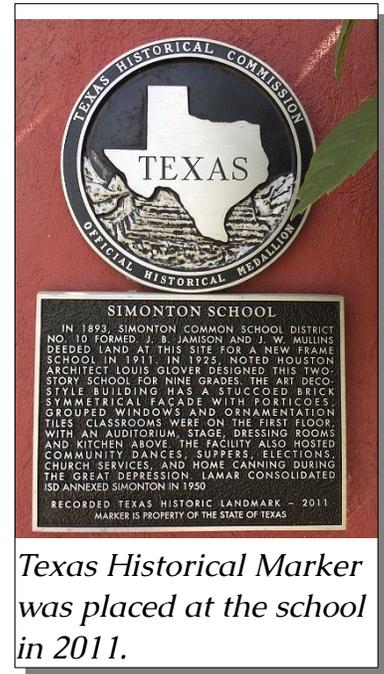
LEAMAN: No, there was no church. There was a church in Simonton, but it was an interdenominational church. We had no full-time minister. It was just like Presbyterian missionaries or some other faith missionaries that came and held a bible school in the summer, or held a three-day meeting or something like that. Years later, there was an organized Christian Science group that was headed by Mrs. Sahol. They met at the school on Sundays.

TERRELL: What was the name of the school?

LEAMAN: Just Simonton Elementary School. It went through six grades.

TERRELL: From there where did you go?

LEAMAN: We went to Rosenberg. The earlier years, we had what was called a common school district. At that time there was a county superintendent who was elected. You ran for county superintendent, and you governed all of the common school districts. Fulshear was one, Simonton was one, as were all of the little schools. The Brown Community and Randon School was another one. There is Randon Road now, off of Spur Ten, that was a community and there was a school out there. In later years, Bill Graeber was one of the county superintendents. At the time I was growing up, my mother served on the county school board; they had a school board just like a regular school district. Mattie Schultz was a well know name in school circles. She was from Rosenberg, and she served for a long time. I don't think I can recall any other county superintendent, because their terms lasted so long (chuckle), they weren't ever booted out.



*Bill Graeber served as the Fort Bend County School Superintendent and advocated for consolidating small school districts. He died on June 24, 2000.*

TERRELL: How did you get to school?

LEAMAN: The Simonton School District had its own bus. It was a little bus, I guess it held about twenty kids, and the bus stayed in Simonton. Our Simonton school district hired a bus driver who drove to Rosenberg or Richmond, killed the day, it must have been a terrible job. But jobs were scarce then. This was in the thirties and early forties.

TERRELL: Was the driver a female or male?

LEAMAN: A male. White. The school district was very lenient with the rules. People could ride to Rosenberg or Richmond on the school bus if they had shopping to do. Of course, they had to spend the whole day there, but there was one lady in Simonton whose daughter lived in Rosenberg. She rode the bus, they'd let her off at the corner, and she walked to her daughter's house to spend the day. Then the bus picked her up.

TERRELL: That's fun.

LEAMAN: Well, it was at a time during the depression when money was tight and people didn't have the money to even buy licenses for their cars much less use gasoline frivolously. Anyway, it was a community service so to speak.

TERRELL: You went to middle school and junior high in Rosenberg?

LEAMAN: Yes, started in the seventh grade. We went through six grades in Simonton. The same seven kids went all the way through school. This was an all white school. We had a Mexican school, and we had, I think, three Negro schools. Either my mother or my father was always on the local school board.

TERRELL: That included all the schools?

LEAMAN: Yes, that included all of them. They had what they called a "Teacherage". Usually, the Mexican schoolteacher was a white lady. Those three or four teachers lived at the "Teacherage." They shared this house, which was kind of interesting.

TERRELL: Where did you go to the store?

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please read Maurice Berkman's interview on this website at <https://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/home/showdocument?id=30518>

LEAMAN: We had two local stores. One was just a general mercantile store run by the Dailys, and the other one was a general mercantile store run by the Berkmans; two Jewish families in our community. The Dailys were there first, in fact Mr. Berkman had worked for Mr. Daily at another store. He then opened his own store.

TERRELL: What did your father do?

LEAMAN: He was a farmer. My grandfather had moved to Texas to grow red potatoes in the very fertile Brazos River bottom. The land in Simonton is not like the black land that is on the prairie, it's red and very fertile. I think the greatest nemesis to growing potatoes were the floods from the Brazos River. There was a flood in, I think 1914, that was really a bad flood and there was a flood in 1919 or 1920, that was really a bad flood.

Or maybe it was a little later than that, because that's when my grandmother and grandfather built their house. They built it up on pilings, about four feet high which put it out of flood stage. There were about ten steps up to the front and back door at the house. When we were kids we played under the house. You could stand up almost; I could, of course, as I was always so short. It was a wonderful place to play.

TERRELL: Is the house still there?

LEAMAN: Oh, yes. I really don't know who owns it now. When my dad decided it was time for him to sell the property, which was about 1955 or '56, a young man whose parents or aunt or somebody was very, very wealthy, decided she was going to buy this place for him. He was only twenty-one years old, and he offered my dad a thousand dollars an acre for the property. I remember my dad's remark to my mother. He said, "If I don't take that, that's when two fools met." So, they sold. It was a big decision to do that. He had had a heart attack by that time and his health was not like he wanted it to be, so they sold it. They sold the farm. Yes, the house is there, and it's in real good shape. It's been well cared for, and it looks nice.

TERRELL: Can you see it from the road?

LEAMAN: Oh, yes.

TERRELL: When your dad sold the property, where did he move?

LEAMAN: They moved to Rosenberg.

TERRELL: So you were in Rosenberg for high school?

LEAMAN: No, no. I was older by then. I was married.

TERRELL: Oh. What did he grow when he was farming? Did he just grow potatoes?

LEAMAN: When they stopped growing potatoes, they grew cotton and corn and alfalfa, and in later years, his main crop was hay. I was growing up then. We had tenant farmers on the property. I was just thinking about it last night. There were either four or five houses where the families lived. They worked on the farm all the time. First of all, if it was potato season, they had to get the seed potatoes, and then they had to cut the potatoes. They'd cut about five or six pieces, so there was an eye in each slice of the potato. In the back yard, the negro women made a circle under the big oak tree and they sat there with the wire baskets between their legs with a croaker sack over their laps and a potato basket. They cut potatoes, and they'd sit there for three or four days working. It took them that long to get all the potatoes cut. There were probably ten or twelve of them in a semi circle working.

EDITOR'S NOTE: a croaker sack is a bag made of burlap or similar material. An example of a croaker sack is a bag that holds many pounds of potatoes.

Then they'd plant them. When they were digging potatoes, each person picking up potatoes had what they called a stand. They picked up the potatoes, put them in the wire baskets and then dumped them in croaker sacks. They filled them half full at the stand.

I was driving a pickup truck by the time I was nine years old, and it was my job to drive by each stand and count how many sacks of potatoes they had. They got paid by the number of sacks of potatoes they had picked during the day.

TERRELL: You were nine years old?

LEAMAN: Yeah, I was driving a pickup truck when I was nine years old.

TERRELL: How many acres were on this farm?

LEAMAN: In the beginning it was called the Spencer and Mullins Farm, because the Mullins were another family that had come from Kansas, had been friends in Kansas, and the two families came together. They had about eight hundred to a thousand acres. After a few years, they split it. The Mullins family took one side of the road and the Spencer family took the other side. They ended up with four hundred and fifty acres apiece.

In later years during the Depression, they borrowed money for some of the crops. My family and the Mullins family did, too. Lost some of the land to the bank, which foreclosed and my dad ended up with about two hundred or two hundred and fifty acres.

It was more like an old plantation style farm. I mean my dad never worked in the field. We always had a lot of help. He didn't drive a tractor, he was just kind of the straw boss. I guess that's what you'd call him (chuckling). It wasn't like the farmers you hear about, that wasn't the life style. It was different than the immigrants that had come over and had to start from scratch.

TERRELL: You went to junior high in Rosenberg, and then did you go to high school in Richmond?

LEAMAN: Oh, no.

TERRELL: It was still Rosenberg? What was that school?

LEAMAN: It's the school that was at the corner of Eighth Street and Avenue H. There was a high school called Rosenberg High School, and Taylor Ray Gym was next door to it. The bus had gone to Richmond for a number of years, but my mother was kind of adamant that she would rather have me go to school in Rosenberg. She had a pretty big influence on getting that changed, and the kids that had already started in Richmond, the bus just went on to Richmond. After they graduated everybody went to Rosenberg.

TERRELL: From Fulshear and Simonton?

LEAMAN: No, just Simonton. Fulshear always went to Richmond.

TERRELL: That was seventh grade through twelfth grade?

LEAMAN: Eleventh grade, we only had eleven grades. I graduated from high school in 1942 and I think that it was probably the next year or two that they put in the twelfth grade. But I only went to eleven grades.

TERRELL: Did you ever go to Richmond-Rosenberg to shop, like on weekends?

LEAMAN: No, we never did. FM 1093 was a gravel road, and we called it "down the track" to Houston. We always went to Houston to shop. We did our grocery shopping in Houston. Other than the local grocery stores, we did all our shopping in Houston.

TERRELL: Did you go all the way to downtown to the farmers market?

LEAMAN: No, no, we went to Henke and Pillot.

TERRELL: Okay, I know Henke and Pillot. Did you do that weekly, or more like monthly?

LEAMAN: Oh, no, more monthly. Any time you needed clothes or anything it was Houston. Where the Galleria is now, there was a little red schoolhouse at Post Oak. But another unique thing that we had was the train. We had a train which I think was an adjunct of the Southern Pacific, but I'm not sure. It went through Simonton and Fulshear, which went down the track into Houston in the mornings. It came through Simonton at ten minutes to nine; back out from Houston it got to Simonton at six thirty. You could ride the train to Houston. It took an hour. You went to the Southern Pacific depot and then from there you could go to town.

Two or three of us girls got on the train and went to Houston. Go to a movie, or go to two movies. Downtown were the Loews and the Metropolitan with Darcie's in between. The people who owned Darcie's, which was a confection store and lunch counter, were relatives of one of the third grade teachers that lived in Simonton. My mother knew the Darcies, so two or three girls got together and went downtown, went to a movie, ate lunch, and went to another movie. We always picked up a cab; we didn't walk to the train station. We picked up a cab at the Lamar Hotel and got back to catch the five o'clock train back home.

TERRELL: That was a fun day. I did that but I did it on the bus. Yours sounds like more fun.

LEAMAN: The conductors on the train knew us and took care of us you know (laughing). It was neat.

TERRELL: So, you're in high school. Did you begin to socialize more with people from Rosenberg? Girls and boys from Rosenberg?

LEAMAN: Yes. I had a friend, Dorothy Louise Huntington, who was related to the Briscoes. Her mother was a Briscoe, and I spent many nights in Rosenberg with her at her home. It was at the corner of Second Street and Avenue I. Then she came to my house for a weekend and just back and forth like that. One of the kind of neat things is that there were no organized teen activities. I guess it was my mother and two or three other mothers who decided that we could have dances upstairs in the school building. The auditorium was a school...

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please read Frank and Mason Briscoe's interviews, respectively, on this website at <https://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/home/showdocument?id=37311> and <https://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/home/showdocument?id=37309>

TERRELL: In Rosenberg?

LEAMAN: No, in Simonton, and the kids from Fulshear came, kids from Rosenberg came. A mother brought a carload of them, and it was just an activity on Friday nights for everybody.

TERRELL: That's fun.

LEAMAN: The community center, I think they called it, bought a record player. I remember. I can see it yet. It was an RCA console record player, and it had records that the kids could dance to. All the Frank Sinatra and that era of records.

TERRELL: Had you taken dancing lessons?

LEAMAN: No, we just had those activities in gym. Kids just learned to dance on their own, no formal dancing lessons.

TERRELL: That's fun. I know that you met Dean, your husband, in school in Rosenberg.

LEAMAN: We met in the seventh grade. But we never dated until senior day in 1942, I guess, May of 1942. We went to Galveston for senior day and I rode home with him in the car. That was our first date.



*Dean K. Leaman, the love of Jackie's life for over 60 years, was a nose gunner in the US Navy during World War II and a Rosenberg businessman until his death in 2008.*

TERRELL: Well you had a long time to talk (laughing).

LEAMAN: Oh, it was a car full of kids.

TERRELL: Oh, okay. Did you go to college?

LEAMAN: I went to Texas State College for Women as it was called then, now it's Texas Woman's University in Denton. Don't ask me why, I just got it in my mind that's where I wanted to go.

TERRELL: Did most of your friends go to college?

LEAMAN: Yes, I think everybody. No, probably five out of the seven that were in my little class from Simonton went to college. One young man was killed in World War II; another one ended up being a doctor. Those were the only two boys. The rest of us were girls, there were five of us. I don't know what happened to one of them. One lives in Katy, one of them lives in Houston and I live here. I've kept up with most of them.

TERRELL: Very nice. During high school, did you spend a lot of time in Rosenberg?

LEAMAN: Yes, quite a lot on weekends. There were three or four girls that went to high school at the same time. The boys rode their bicycles out to Simonton on a Saturday. Then my dad usually took a pick-up truck and brought them back in (laughing) with their bicycles.

TERRELL: That was nice, how far was the mileage?

LEAMAN: Seventeen miles.

TERRELL: They wanted to get there, I think! (laughing). Can you tell me a little bit about Rosenberg and what it was like? You said you didn't shop there.

LEAMAN: No, personally we didn't. Avenue H was the main street, and our high school was there.

TERRELL: Did you go to Richmond often?

LEAMAN: No, we never did go to Richmond. I don't know why. My friends were there of course. The schools weren't consolidated until well after I got out of high school. I think they consolidated in 1949 or '50; that was the first class that was the consolidated school district.

TERRELL: After you rode home with Dean from senior day, did you go out with him shortly thereafter?

LEAMAN: I guess so; that seventeen miles was kind of a break-through. I don't remember what happened that summer much though. That year he went to Baylor and I went to Denton, so we didn't see each other. I don't think we even corresponded that much. Then he went into the service. He only had one year at Baylor, and he joined the Navy in May of the next year.

TERRELL: Did you correspond with him when he went into the Navy?

LEAMAN: Yes. That's when we started dating really. He was down in Corpus Christi at boot camp, and then he went to aviation ordinance school up in Norman, Oklahoma. Another time, he was in another school in Hutchinson, Kansas.

He hitchhiked down to Denton to see me. He was homesick, and I was the closest person he knew. He got a pass and hitchhiked. He always had enough money in his pocket to buy a ticket if he couldn't get a ride, but you know everybody hitchhiked then. Anybody in the service was always picked up. He kept coming to Denton to see me.

From there he went overseas. I graduated in 1946, and he had gotten out in the spring of that year. He had gotten out of the service I think in April, and I graduated in May or June of that year. Then, I think we were engaged probably by Christmas of that year. Then we married in June of '47.

TERRELL: Can you give me just a few recollections of what you remember him telling you about his childhood in Beasley, since we didn't get to interview him.

LEAMAN: He grew up here.

TERRELL: In Rosenberg?

LEAMAN: Yes. His dad managed a lumberyard in Beasley, but they moved here. He was born in Rosenberg, and they moved here. They moved away for about a year and moved to Ennis where his dad managed a lumberyard, and then came back, and lived here.

TERRELL: Did Dean work in this lumberyard?

LEAMAN: Oh, no, Dean was just a baby then. His dad opened Home Building in 1931, so Dean was only six years old then. One of the funny stories that they told, even Janette, his sister, said she never heard this story. He went to Robert E. Lee School when he was in the first grade and everybody walked everywhere then. At that time, they were living on Fourth Street in a rent house right next to the Methodist Church in the back.

He went home one day after school and went in the back door where his mother always had cookies and milk for him. He went to the back door and started inside, and this lady intercepted him and said, "What are you doing here? You don't live here anymore." His mother and dad had moved over on Avenue G, and he swears no one told him that they were moving! (laughter)

TERRELL: Well, you lived in Rosenberg after you and Dean married. What did he do?

LEAMAN: He went to the University of Houston for a couple of years and was working on an architecture degree, but he got more interested in the lumber yard and decided that he was just going to do that. He never finished college. He started to work at the lumber yard and then helped it grow.

TERRELL: What was the name of it?

LEAMAN: Home Building and Lumber Company.

TERRELL: His father was still there?

LEAMAN: Oh, yes, his father died in 1967, I think. So, he was there almost twenty more years.

TERRELL: When did he start Allied Concrete?

LEAMAN: 1954. It started as a partnership. The other man had some dump trucks and Dean didn't want it to be known he was part owner. The town was still so little that the thinking might be if they bought the lumber from the lumber yard, then they'd buy the concrete from someplace else, not to double up. There was one other ready-mix company in town at that time. That's why Dean didn't want his name associated with the concrete company.

TERRELL: How many children do you have?

LEAMAN: Two, boys. Lee has been active in the lumberyard. He graduated from SMU in about 1972, and Ken graduated from SMU in 1973. Lee had an accounting degree and worked for Ernst and Ernst for one year. Then he decided he wanted to come home and go into the business.

Ken graduated from SMU and traveled around out in the northwest for about a year. He decided he wanted to go to veterinary school. So, he came back and went to A&M to veterinary school. Then he moved to the Seattle area and has been there ever since.

TERRELL: You have how many grandchildren and great-grandchildren?

LEAMAN: Seven grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren.

TERRELL: That's wonderful! Where did you live in Rosenberg after you were married?

LEAMAN: We built a one-room house that was ready for us after we married. It was on Leaman Street. It was a house that Dean designed and it was really quite unique. It was one room with a bathroom, a closet, dressing room and a kitchen. The rest was one room that was divided by bookcases to make a dining room, a bedroom and a living area. We just moved the bookcases around if we needed to.

With each child that was born we added a room. We were able to pay for the additions so that our payments on our house were \$19.19 a month until we moved after ten years. The payments on the house that we built on Main Avenue were a \$120.21. We were never so broke in our lives! We didn't think we were going to make it.

TERRELL: Oh, my goodness. But you did (laughter).

LEAMAN: We lived in that house on Main Avenue for fifty-one years.

TERRELL: Did you add on to that house or was it always the same size?

LEAMAN: We did do some additions to that house because my mother and father and Dean's mother and father all died within four years. We had two houses to get rid of, so we sold both houses and used the money to add on to our house. We thought that was the best way to keep that legacy. We lived in that house for fifty years until after he died.

TERRELL: When did he pass away?

LEAMAN: Two years ago in May 2008.

TERRELL: He was a great man. If you could describe the changes in Richmond and Rosenberg, I guess mainly Rosenberg, what would you mention?

LEAMAN: I think one of the biggest changes was the consolidation of the schools because it broke down a lot of barriers. Dean's dad was on the Rosenberg school board for seventeen years and he was President of the board at the time of that consolidation. He really deserved a lot of credit for getting it underway, getting it completed because they had a lot of opposition from Richmond. (Whispering) I shouldn't be saying that.

TERRELL: It was not integrated at that time was it?

LEAMAN: I believe so, yes. I believe so.

TERRELL: What about the town of Rosenberg?

LEAMAN: Well, I don't know what I can say about it. It seems like it didn't grow that fast at that time. There were new subdivisions that went in and there was building.

TERRELL: Maybe not like now with Brazos Town Center!

LEAMAN: No, no, no. The business district didn't change that much.

TERRELL: Can you think of anything that I haven't asked you?

LEAMAN: No, I don't think so.

TERRELL: Well, lets conclude this interview. Thank you.

Interview ends