

# FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

## *ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE*

Interviewees: **JoAnn Cangelosi Hargrove**

Interview Date: 11/03/2012

Interviewer: Jane Goodsill

Transcriber: Carlos Rubalcaba

Location / Interview taken at St. Johns United Methodist Church in  
Comments: Richmond, Texas. For related interviews, see Joe Falsone,  
Lawrence Vaccaro and Jean Court

11 Pages



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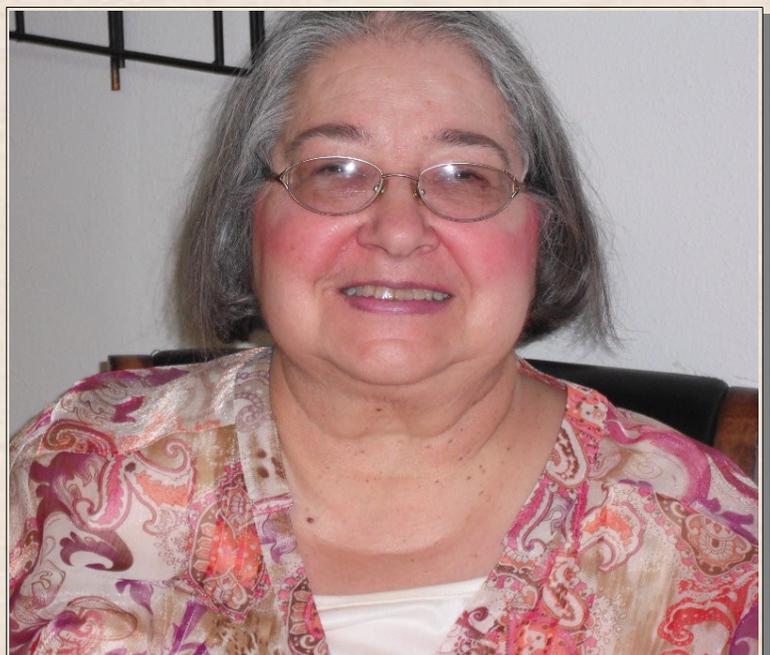
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*Transcript*

GOODSILL: Nice of you to come in JoAnn I have been looking forward to taking your interview. Start by telling me your full name and date of birth.

HARGROVE: JoAnn Cangelosi Hargrove. I was born August 28, 1927

GOODSILL: That's a very familiar name to many of us. Why don't you tell us why?

HARGROVE: Okay, my family, headed by Carlo Giovanni Cangelosi, started in Sicily and immigrated over 1878. They went through New Orleans then to Texas and settled in the Bryan area in a town named Mudville. For several years in a row they had crop failures because of flooding! Giovanni suggested that his son, Frank, go to Sugar Land to visit the Sugar Refinery. While in the area Frank also visited Stafford. He saw the land was located far enough away from the river that there would not be any loss of crops due to flooding. Great Grandfather Giovanni died in 1912 but sons Carlo and Frank, and later Joe, moved to Stafford.

Frank and his wife, Katie, and mother Angelina Salvaggio Cangelosi moved to Stafford in 1917. Carlo and his wife, Lena Scanlin Cangelosi, moved in 1918. Brother Anthony (Tony) Cangelosi moved to Corsicana and later Houston. Mary and her husband, Frank Tritico and brother Dominic lived in Houston. Sister Frances married Joe Falsone and died in childbirth.

The Cangelosi's bought eleven acres of land on "the island" in Stafford and 700 acres of farmland. The land on "the island" consisted of three houses, a barn, mercantile store and a cotton gin. My grandfather Carlo had been a farmer in Bryan. He and his wife, Lena, came on the train to Stafford with six children and all their livestock. He stayed in the cars with the livestock to feed the animals for three days while grandmother rode in the passenger cars with the six children.

My father, Pete was born in Stafford. He was the seventh child born. Two children came after him, Joe, who died at age five and Frances who died of influenza. The other children lived to be adults.

Frank died serving in the Army World War II. He died in France shortly before he was due to come home. The other brothers did not serve in the war. My father had a hernia and could not pass the physical. His brother Tony worked the farm. Uncle John raised cattle and he did not serve. Frank was the only one of the four brothers that went to the military.

GOODSILL: Do you know what year your family left Sicily?

HARGROVE: 1878. Carlo and Lena Scanlin were married in 1901. Carlo died in 1937. Lena died in 1958.

GOODSILL: What was happening in Sicily in 1878?

HARGROVE: I think the mafia was a problem. Also my great grandfather didn't have good health. They decided to come to America, where he had a brother, to see if it was a better climate for him. They left their land with relatives in Sicily. When they determined the Bryan area was better for his health they told the relatives to sell their property in Sicily.

GOODSILL: That accounts for why they had a little bit of money, because they sold their property in Sicily.

HARGROVE: Right, yes

GOODSILL: So go back to your grandfather, from Sicily, his name is Carlo?

HARGROVE: Carlo Giovanni Cangelosi. He had a heart condition so the doctor told him he could him he couldn't farm any more. He started the mercantile business in 1925.

GOODSILL: Did he meet Lena in Bryan or in Stafford?

HARGROVE: He met her in Bryan. She was born in Bryan. He was born in Sicily.

GOODSILL: Tell me their children, oldest first if you can.

HARGROVE: Their oldest child was Angelina, then Mary, then Lunetta, then Johnny, then Anthony [Tony] then my dad Pete and Frank. Joe and Francis were the babies that died. My father is Pete and he married Carmeline Scarpinato in January of 1944.

GOODSILL: How many children did they have?

HARGROVE: They had four children. Marie, JoAnn, Peter and Mary Kay.

HARGROVE: Oh I'm sorry there was a Dominic, son of Giovanni and Angela. He was deaf and dumb. He lived with Sister Mary and husband Frank Tritico. Later on he was placed in a home. He died when I was a small child.

GOODSILL: Tell me what you know about the immigration process. If you were Italian and you moved to Texas where you embraced, was it easy place to live? Was it challenging?

HARGROVE: I think if they had money to buy land they didn't have a problem. There were quite a few Italian families in the Bryan bottomland area that had small farms... probably a hundred acres or more. Some of them had fifty acres some of them had less. Their livelihood depended on those crops every year. And all those floods...

GOODSILL: It's amazing they had any resources left after that.

HARGROVE: Yes! When they were able to move to Stafford they were far enough away from the river that they didn't have that problem. There was one time when the river came all the way to Sugar Land but they never said that Stafford ever flooded. Now during Hurricane Carla there was a lot of flooding around where Lake Olympia is now.

GOODSILL: What do you think Stafford was like back in 1916?

HARGROVE: Stafford was a small town in 1916. There where many blacks living in the area. During reconstruction the landowners sold to the blacks and there were quite a few blacks and some Hispanics that lived in Stafford. William Stafford's children sold off their land and moved to Victoria and places like that, they didn't stay in Stafford. Two of the children stayed in Stafford. Martha married Pascal Borden and he had property in Stafford. The Borden Milk Company is from that family. Mary married W.R. Neal and lived in Stafford.

GOODSILL: Eventually there was a large Italian population in Stafford. Was your family the first? Or did they follow some others?

HARGROVE: They were the first and were influential in the others coming to Stafford because my grandfather's brother Frank would go back to Bryan and sell land to friends and relatives who would come to Stafford to make their livelihood.

GOODSILL: Tell me the story, as you know it, of how Stafford grew.

HARGROVE: I would say in the 1920s that probably twenty or thirty Italian families bought land. It was very much a farming community. They raised cotton, they raised okra, some of them had maze. There weren't any rice farmers in that area because there was no water for irrigation. They did have cotton pickers in the fifties.

I can remember them having cotton pickers and also remember the migrant workers that would come from the Valley and they would pick the crops. There were two gins in the area and our gin, the Cangelosi Gin, was one of them. Different farmers would bring their crops to the gin to be processed. They would sell their seed afterwards and buy seed for the next years crop and be prepared for the next round of planting.

GOODSILL: Well now, tell us more about the store.

HARGROVE: It was built in 1964. The address was 110 Avenue F. The store was a small store owned by Carlo. It had been a saloon before it ever became the grocery store. They had trouble with rats and they



would have to put out traps for the rats. It was an old building formerly located on North Main and Highway 90. It had rooms above that they rented out so they were able to have the money coming in. My grandfather died in 1937 from his heart condition. My father was only fourteen when his father died. John took over the business. He was not happy in the business and after a year he decided he didn't want to do it anymore. So Tony ran the business and the farm. His wife Angeline worked in the store with him side by side. My father was still in school but when my father graduated from high school Tony asked him to be his partner. They worked in the store together.

GOODSILL: And that was a good partnership.

HARGROVE: A good partnership, yes. In 1944 they decided to add a furniture store to the grocery store. My mother and father were running the furniture store and Tony and Angeline were running the grocery store. Cangelosi Furniture closed in 1972. The Grocery store closed in 1974. They had the largest grocery market in Fort Bend County from 1964 to 1974. They rented the business to Grocer Supply to be a bigger grocery store and sold all the furniture.

GOODSILL: Tell me what year you were born.

HARGROVE: I was born in nineteen 1947. My sister Marie was born in 1945.

GOODSILL: Tell me what it was like for you, growing up in Stafford in the store.

HARGROVE: It was my job to polish the furniture. I was supposed to dust and so they would bring me to the store on Saturdays and I would dust all the furniture. That was my job.

GOODSILL: Did you like it? You were proud of that furniture?

HARGROVE: Yes, I was. I liked it. Then he would bring me to the store with him in the summer time and give me little jobs to do in the grocery store and furniture store. I was proud of that and when I was in high school he had me work the Courtesy Booth. I would cash checks and take payments for furniture and sell on the furniture floor. I worked there in high school on Saturday and in college in the summer.

GOODSILL: Where did you go to college?

HARGROVE: I went to Sam Houston in Huntsville and Wharton Junior College.

GOODSILL: Now growing up you must have had a lot of cousins.

HARGROVE: Oh yes! There are about fourteen first cousins that lived in the same town and my mother's family lived there also. The Scarpinatos and all their children stayed in Stafford so they all were right there in the same town.

GOODSILL: Then your grandmother Lena Scanlin was another branch?

HARGROVE: Her brothers and sisters lived there to in the same town. I had cousins everywhere. The Sunday before Thanksgiving we have a family reunion and we'd go to one of the cousins house and have a covered dish Thanksgiving dinner. We keep the family together that way.

GOODSILL: That sounds very nice.

HARGROVE: Yes, and I became a teacher and I taught 19 years. I also worked as a secretary some of those years. I worked all-told 23 years.

GOODSILL: What did you teach?

HARGROVE: I taught US history. In the eight grade.

GOODSILL: I know you're involved with the Fort Bend County Historical Commission; does your interest in history draw you?

HARGROVE: Oh yes, yes. I am a member of the Historical Commission. I also majored in business. I worked in businesses throughout Houston and I worked for Harris County as a secretary for the Community Development Department for four years. So I have my Harris County retirement as well as teacher retirement and I got to know a little bit about county government from the Community Development Department. They called it an agency. We built roads and bridges and libraries and did improvements for water districts, things like that. We also had social service agencies that we funded and I was able to see how they were able to give help to individuals who were in dire need, rehab houses and work with the homeless, the poor, and battered women.

GOODSILL: I have taken other interviews from people from Stafford. I have found that there was a big emphasis on community involvement. I guess that's a high priority for your family and your relations.

HARGROVE: Yes, yes, my father was on the original City Council when Stafford was formed. He served, I think one or two terms on City Council and then he was elected to the water board and he served on the water board for 20 years and was president. He was also involved in forming the East Fort Bend Chamber of Commerce and served as the first president. He was also a member of the Volunteer Fire Department and was a stockholder in First National Bank. He contributed to the community for over 30 years.



GOODSILL: That's quite a story going from the 1800s to 2012. This is the story of a family that has done really well in the immigration process, thrived and built a community.

HARGROVE: Right, and they believed in education. There were seven teachers in the family. They really believed that it was okay for a women to stay home with their children when they were small then be able to go back and teach. Quite a few of us have done that. In the third generation of Cangelosi's everyone attended college.

GOODSILL: That's a point of pride. Let me ask you to go over some of these questions I have written down.

HARGROVE: Okay, well my grandmother Cangelosi, Lena, was businesswomen. She was not the homemaker that stayed home. She had rent property and she would dress up in the morning and be ready to go out and check the property. She would help in the store with her husband. Her older children took care of the babies at home. She wanted to make sure that the people paid their bills in the grocery store. She collected from them. She was only five feet tall but she was quite impressive as far as a businesswomen was concerned. She'd get dressed and fix her hair and she had an amethyst pin that had been brought from California and that was her jewelry of the day. She didn't get dressed without putting on that pin. She had a car but she didn't drive and she would walk to her different properties and check to make sure nothing was broken and if she thought something needed to be fixed she would go and buy the supplies and fix it herself.

GOODSILL: Do you remember her?

HARGROVE: Oh, yes. She died when I was twelve and we lived next door to her and so I remember quite a bit about her. My mother's mother, Annie Tritico Scarpinato, only went to the third grade. She was one of the oldest of nine children and so she had to stay home and take care of the children so she only went to the third grade. If somebody wrote her name on a piece of paper she could write her name out by looking at what they wrote, but she couldn't read. She wasn't a reader but she could make just about any kind of recipe without following the directions, she would do it from scratch. She could make homemade cookies and all kinds of meats and vegetables and soups.

GOODSILL: Everybody has a talent. Do you remember her?

HARGROVE: Oh, yes very much so. When my children were born and she knew my children. She was quite a character. She wasn't a happy person unless she was holding a baby. Then she was so happy, she had the biggest smile on her face whenever that baby was in her arms. It was a sweet thing to see, you know we didn't remember that side of her because we were kids and we didn't notice, but when we were adults and somebody came over with a baby her eyes just lit up and she had the biggest smile on her face. I wasn't working when my children were small and so I would take the babies over to see her and she would fix home made soup and we would eat lunch with her. She was so tickled that we came.

GOODSILL: Why don't you tell us the names of your family?

HARGROVE: My husband is Howard Hargrove and we were married in June of 1971 in Stafford at Holy Family Church. [insert wedding photo] We have two children Sherry who was born in 1973 and Vincent who was born in 1975. Sherry is married to Brooke Honore and they have three children, Erica, Natalie and Brook. They live in Manvel. My son Vincent is not married and he lives in Australia.



GOODSILL: You live in Sugar Land no, are there very many Cangelosi's left in Stafford?

HARGROVE: There's one. Of all the family there is only one cousin left that lives in Stafford. They all married and got jobs and went where their husbands wanted to live. They moved away one by one. There was one sister, Angelina Salvaggio, who lived in Navasota; she lived to be almost ninety. She had four children and a farm and she raised her twins there and she had two more children in addition to that. Their names were Angeline, Anthony, Charles and Anthelina (Ann). She had twins and her mother-in-law and father-in-law lived with her because they were in poor health, they sent Anthelina to live with Grandmother Lena Cangelosi in Stafford. She was raised as one of grandma's children with my daddy. So they were more like brother and sister than niece and uncle.

GOODSILL: Was church very much a part of the Cangelosi life?

HARGROVE: Church was very big. On both sides of the family they were very involved in church. Holy Family was the name of the parish. Both the site in Stafford and the site in Missouri City were donated by Katie Cangelosi. All of us cousins were married at Holy Family Church in the 1960s and 1970s. My parents were married there and my parents had their wedding reception at the Missouri City Gymnasium because there were no halls to have any kind of parties at. So they would rent the school and have the reception at the school gymnasium.

GOODSILL: Every Sunday morning everybody you knew was in church?

HARGROVE: You didn't go anywhere without going to church. There was no staying home or sleeping in. You got up and you got dressed in your finest clothes and you went to church.

GOODSILL: And family day after that? To grandma's to eat?

HARGROVE: Sometimes, not every Sunday. Sometimes my mother fixed spaghetti at home on Sundays.

The other thing we did was go to Weldon's Cafeteria in the Museum District in Houston. The Cangelosi brothers would take their families together and the three brothers would be there with their children. It would be like a Cangelosi party at Weldon's Cafeteria on a Sunday after mass. Good times! The other thing we did was go to the drive-in theater in Houston to watch the movies and go to Princes Hamburgers and get a hamburger on Sunday night

GOODSILL: The family part of it sounds fun, such a sense of belonging.

HARGROVE: Oh very much so, yes and going to visit relatives was a big deal for entertainment. You know you would go to see the relatives on Sunday afternoon after church. Take turns going to see all the aunts and uncles and paying your respects.

GOODSILL: Was Italian still spoken?

HARGROVE: No, not at all. They would say pane for bread and pasta for spaghetti. Grandparents spoke Italian, but not in front of the children.

GOODSILL: They wanted their children to be American and to follow the American way. I understand. I feel like this gives us a real feel for the family. This has been an interesting interview sociologically and historically. Is there anything else you can think of that we haven't covered?

HARGROVE: I think we covered everything.

GOODSILL: Great, thank you so much JoAnn

Interview ends.