

# FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

## *ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE*

Interviewee: **Joe Falsone**

Interview Date: 05/08/2010

Interviewer: Jane Goodsill

Transcriber: Marsha Smith

Location: Stafford Center, Stafford, Texas

18 Pages



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*Transcript*

GOODSILL: Would you like to tell me the date of your birth?

FALSONE: September 23, 1931.

GOODSILL: Where were you born?

FALSONE: Sugar Land Hospital.

GOODSILL: Let's go back in time a little bit and tell me about your parents and grandparents, and then we'll work up to the present day. What was your father's full name?

FALSONE: Anthony James Falsone. He was born in Steel Store, Texas, near the Brazos bottom in 1895. He moved from there to Highbank, Texas, and then from there to Stafford.

GOODSILL: He moved to Stafford in 1928, and he came here to get part ownership in a cotton gin. Did he know about cotton ginning?

FALSONE: Yes. He and his brother had a gin in Highbank, Texas. He sold his interest there and moved to Stafford.

GOODSILL: Tell me something about cotton ginning. What a day in the life of a cotton gin manager was like?

FALSONE: Well, it's seasonal. During the season when cotton comes in (chuckles), it's hard to explain! It's just a lot of machinery.

GOODSILL: You take the cotton, you run it through the machine...

FALSONE: It cleans it. The gin saws take the lint off the seed and separate it and then it goes through the press. It's pressed and put into a bale.

GOODSILL: This a labor-intensive business?



*Joe's father, who was a farmer and manager of the family's partnership cotton gin in Stafford.*

FALSONE: Yes, a lot of hand labor. Well, it used to be, but not anymore.

GOODSILL: So this was quite a venture. Do you think he took a leap of faith or did he know business was going to be good when he came down here?

FALSONE: My father went to A&M and took a course in cotton grading, which was a few hours back then. That's where he got his experience. Daddy was VERY good at it. If cotton had spots in it, he'd hold it up to the sun, and with his fingers, he could tell you the fiber length, the quality, and the whole bit. He was good at it.



*Cangelosi-Falsone Cotton Gin, Stafford, Texas, ca. 1930*

GOODSILL: How did he know Mr. Cangelosi?

FALSONE: Mr. Cangelosi's sister was married to my uncle. She died in childbirth. They were good friends.

GOODSILL: Was it a good business partnership for them?

FALSONE: Yes. Mr. Cangelosi was here, and he got my father to come down and buy an interest. His brother, Tony Cangelosi, wanted to get out of the business and my dad bought his interest in the gin, here in Stafford.

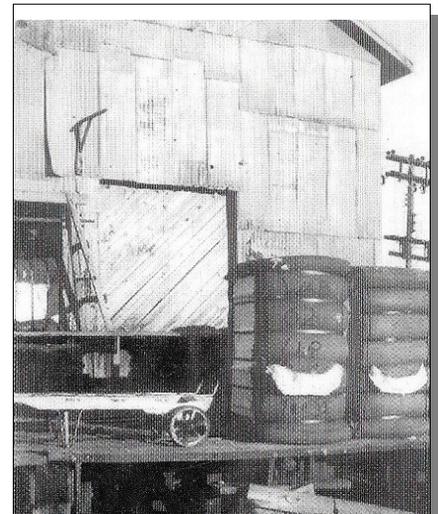
GOODSILL: How long did he own the gin?

FALSONE: It was torn down in 1956 and we sold the property in 1995.

GOODSILL: Where is this property? What's on it now?

FALSONE: It's on Avenue E; corner of Avenue E and North Main.

GOODSILL: He ran the cotton gin but he was also a judge. How did one get trained to be a judge in those days?



*Bales of cotton (right foreground) at the cotton gin*

FALSONE: My daddy would go to the Richmond Court House and watch trials taking place. He also was very smart. If he read this (taps on something on table) today, and you asked him about it the next year, he'd tell you about it. In other words, he had a photographic mind.

Once I was taking World History and asked my dad questions. He would give the answers to me as it was in the book. He hadn't looked at my book in years but he could tell me every answer. Finally, after I asked him about ten questions, he said, "Boy, go look that up yourself." My brothers were taking Algebra I and they were having trouble with it. They could not understand it. So my dad said, "Let me look at that. You know, when you start in Algebra, you look at the equation that shows you how it works." He looked at that and said, "Oh, this is the way you do that!"

EDITOR'S NOTE: Contrary to ordinary mental imagery, eidetic images are externally projected, experienced as "out there" rather than in the mind. By contrast, photographic memory may be defined as the ability to recall pages of text, numbers, or similar, in great detail, without the visualization that comes with eidetic memory. -- *Wikipedia*

GOODSILL: You must have admired him!

FALSONE: Oh, he was a VERY smart and good man.

GOODSILL: What was your mother's name?

FALSONE: My mother's name was Lena Roppolo.

GOODSILL: How many children did they have?

FALSONE: There were five of us. The oldest was Jim. Nick was next, followed by Mary. I was the fourth child followed by my sister Pauline.

GOODSILL: Did any of the kids seem to inherit your dad's fantastic memory?

FALSONE: No! That was a trait that was just something he had. He was a genius! He was fluent in Spanish and Italian. The patrolmen in the county would come to our house and bring somebody in for speeding or other violations.



*Joe's sister, Pauline, mother, Lena, and daughter-in-law, Mary, in the fields picking cotton.*

My dad would be sitting over there writing up the ticket and the report, taking all the information down. I'll never forget one day there were two guys picked up who were from Mexico. They were talking to each other in Spanish and didn't realize my daddy could understand every word. My daddy just sat there writing. When he got through, he turned and started talking to them in Spanish and they started waiving their hands saying, "Oh, Judge!" They could speak English and didn't realize my dad could understand every word. In Spanish they said, "We're going to get railroaded and this is a kangaroo court." My dad just let them go on.

GOODSILL: Was he appointed as a judge?

FALSONE: He was elected Justice of the Peace, Precinct 3 from 1937-1942 and 1949-1952.

GOODSILL: Did he stop working at the cotton gin or did he do both of them.

FALSONE: He was still manager of the gin until 1956.

GOODSILL: So he did it all!

FALSONE: He did it all, yes.

GOODSILL: Your father used to do some mediating between farmers?

FALSONE: They would bring in their problems and he would read what information they had. Then he would explain to them what the situation was and how to handle it. My father would also go with some of the families to the Richmond courthouse for probate. Some of the people didn't know what to do once they got to court, so my dad used to help them handle probate in front of the judge. I had a friend who told me just about a month ago, "You know, I'll never forget your dad." He said, "We asked him to go with us because we didn't know what to do." He said, "Sure, I'll go with y'all," and it helped us probate our property after our father passed away.

GOODSILL: He was evidently good at getting people to see both sides of a situation and making everybody happy.

FALSONE: Yes. My dad had a bookcase full of law books. I mean, a FULL set of law books. My daddy really wanted to be a lawyer. He would read those books and that's where he would get his information. When Mr. Frank Cangelosi passed away in 1940, it took him three years to put all of Mr. Cangelosi's business in order.

He owned property all around. He had to go back to Bryan to get the deeds. He owned property in Alvin and the Houston area. Mr. Cangelosi was one of those guys who never wrote anything down.

GOODSILL: So your dad never got to be a lawyer but he was a judge, so that was pretty close. He ALMOST got his desire in life.

FALSONE: Yes! Yes.

When the old Italians got letters from their kinfolk from Italy, my dad would go to the little Catholic church over here on North Main, Holy Family, which moved to Missouri City many years later as it expanded. But my father would get out of church and they would say, "Oh, Mr. Falsone, Mr. Falsone, read this to me." They couldn't read Italian, and he read the letters and tell them what their brothers, their cousins, or others had written to them.

GOODSILL: That's quite a service!

FALSONE: A lot of the farmers here didn't have an education.

GOODSILL: Of course! They were working, not going to school.

FALSONE: They had enough schooling to write their name and their ABCs and maybe a little math. But for a lot of the difficult problems that needed to be taken care of, they came to him. We were busy ALL the time with people coming in and out of our home. ALL the time!

GOODSILL: Where was your home?

FALSONE: It was on 3019 North Main. It's still there.

GOODSILL: I have in my notes that your father was invited by President Roosevelt to attend the 1935 farmers convention in Washington.

FALSONE: Yes ma'am. The train stopped here in Stafford. They had a water tower, and the train stopped right in front of the house. My daddy just walked across the street with his suitcase, got on the train, and went to Washington. My daddy brought home a 3½ – 4 foot long picture with all the farmers and the delegates in Washington.

GOODSILL: That's the kind of thing that's very intriguing to people who are doing historic research. That was a one-time event.

FALSONE: Someone from Richmond-Rosenberg went also, I'm sure.

GOODSILL: It's a panoramic photo of all the farmers who went to Washington?

FALSONE: And my daddy's in there (chuckles).

GOODSILL: Oh, that's great! Did he ever tell you about what that trip was like?

FALSONE: My dad wasn't a talker, he was more of a thinker. I mean, he had conversations with people, but he was more of a private person. He'd visit with the guys and discuss things, but my daddy used to do a lot of reading. My dad would sit down after we had supper at 8 or 9 o'clock, and sometimes read until 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning. I'd wake up in bed and I'd look to see my dad still in the den, reading a book. I'd get up and say something to him and he'd say, "Oh, I'm just about finished with this book, and I'm going to bed." He would read all night like that!

GOODSILL: Quite an intellectual. Is there anything else you want to say about your mother?

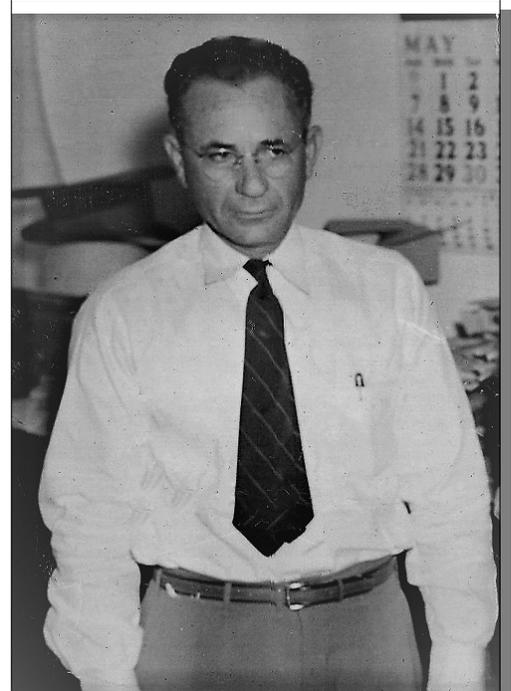
FALSONE: My mom was a good housekeeper. She raised us well. My mom never said too much. My mother was always a listener. My mother never got into problems with anybody because if she heard something, if somebody would say, "You know" and pass gossip, my mother would say, "No, I don't know anything about that." (laughs)

GOODSILL: Smart woman! (laughs)

FALSONE: I mean to tell you! VERY smart! But my mother was more of a homemaker.

GOODSILL: Good. It's wonderful to have someone like that. She had five children, so she had of LOT of homemaking to do!

FALSONE: Yes! My dad had heart problems. He was born with a bad valve in his heart. My dad never did any hard labor because of his heart problems. He died in 1953, at 56. He was speaking at a meeting.



*Joe's dad, A. J. Falsone, ca. 1950.*

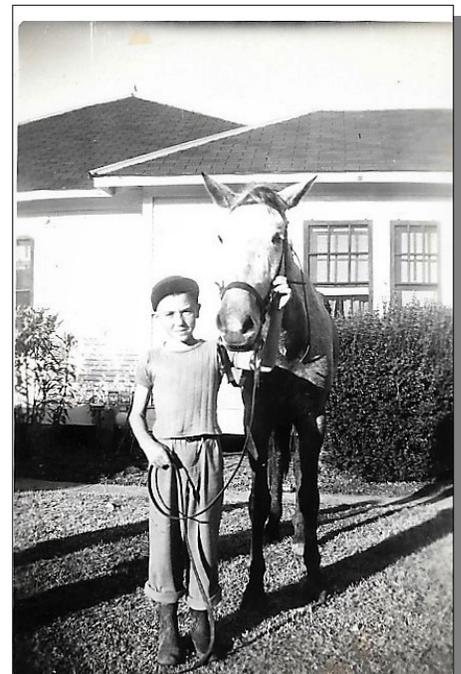
The rice farmers were spraying a weed killer, 2,4D, in the air around DeWalt and the Blue Ridge area. They would spray this 2,4D and it would get on the cotton and cripple it. Whatever stage the cotton was in – it wouldn't KILL it, just stunt it. He was at this meeting speaking about how much money they needed for each bale of cotton that was ginned. There was a certain amount of money needed to be collected in order to pay for the attorney fees to fight this 2,4D, to get it eliminated or used in ground machines and not by air. He was speaking, and as soon as he got through speaking, they say he reached for his heart and just fell over. That was in June of 1953.

We wound up getting Percy Foreman to fight this case. Percy was something else. You talk about somebody SMART, he was one smart guy. He was over there shuffling papers. My brother, Jim, was the secretary and we were at the Missouri City gymnasium. They were sitting at a table, more or less a desk, and he was shuffling papers, he was talking to my brother. I was sitting nearby and thought to myself, "He's not paying attention! He's not paying attention to this!" Percy got up and said, "You, Mr. So-and-so, and you, Mr. So-and-so, and you, Mr. So-and-so," and mentioned each-and-every one of their names, and told them what he was going to do to them if they didn't stop spraying this stuff on people's cotton. He said, "I'm going to get your tractors, I'm going to get your land, I'm going to get EVERYTHING you own." That's what he told them!

The guy from the state department was there. This was after my father had passed away. The guy from the state department said, "Whoa, whoa, whoa! We'll let you know what's going to happen." Then it was eliminated, they couldn't use the chemical anymore in the air. They could only use it by ground and at a certain time of day.

GOODSILL: Your dad would have been SO happy!  
That's a good ending to that story.

FALSONE: But it was killing the cotton. We had farmers coming to that meeting at the old Holy Family Church, all the way from Liberty and on the other side of Houston. They were coming because they were having the same problem we were having down here.



*Joe with his horse named Blue, ca. 1946.*

They were coming from hundreds of miles away. They were coming from Beaumont because there was a lot of rice in that area and there were a few cotton farmers there, too.

The rice growers were spraying that 2,4D week killer. This stuff would float for thirty miles! In the morning, when they would put it out, when the airplanes went up to make the turn, it was drifting in all directions.

GOODSILL: As you grew up, what business did you go into?

FALSONE: I was a cotton farmer. My brother, Jim, and I were partners. We started farming together with my dad. When my dad passed away, it was my mother, my brother, Jim, and I farming.

GOODSILL: On the land in Stafford?

FALSONE: Yes. I farmed until 1979.

GOODSILL: Where is this land now?

FALSONE: I farmed the land on the west side of FM 1092, at the railroad tracks. I farmed across FM 1092, all the way to Greenbriar and Mula Road. It was 192 acres. My dad farmed it when I was a little, bitty kid.

One funny thing that happened – one time I was riding with my dad when he went to the field. There was a dairy, the Storlin Brothers, Ollie and, I can't remember the other brother. We were farming cotton along the railroad track. Back behind the other pasture they had a dairy. I'm sitting in the car, a little kid, and my daddy was walking in the field.

This Jersey bull saw his reflection shining on the side of our car. He was there at the fence, just pawing away, and I'm just SCARED TO DEATH! (laughing) I'm in the car, and I'm ducking, like this, looking out the window, and he was just pawing away and bellowing and making all kinds of noise. I thought he was going to come through the fence! He was getting ready for a fight.

GOODSILL: (laughing) This was when you were a little boy?

FALSONE: Little boy.

GOODSILL: Well that gets to my next question. Tell me what some of the days were like in your life, when you were a little boy.

FALSONE: Oh, gee whiz! It wasn't very exciting, I'll tell you. I did more visiting with people, going around and talking to people. But there wasn't much TO do.

GOODSILL: Did you have to work very hard when you were a little boy?

FALSONE: I started working probably when I was ten years old. My dad tried to keep us brothers busy and out of trouble, so we chopped cotton. He didn't push us very much, just kept us busy. During the ginning season, I used to haul out trash and other jobs like that.

In the summers, when I got older, I'd work 6:00 to 6:00. In the mornings, I'd drive to Sunnyside off the South Loop in Houston to pick up laborers. I'd get to bed around 12 noon. By then you couldn't sleep because it was so hot and there was no air conditioning. So, we didn't get much rest.

When I was a little kid, I'd be in school and my dad would tell me, "When you get home from school, the mule will be tied to the fence. You go over there and hook up the roller and roll the cotton." You know, pack it in. So I'd say, "Okay," and I did that. Then as I got older, I started driving tractors and working in the gin. I was probably fifteen or sixteen years old when I was doing the harder labor.

GOODSILL: Did you say your father was involved with the school board as well?

FALSONE: Oh, yes.

GOODSILL: Well, tell us about that and then tell us about what the schools were like in Stafford.

FALSONE: Well, the school was a Missouri City school. It wasn't IN Stafford. In other words, it was the Missouri City School District and it took in eighty square miles. It covered the southern end of Fort Bend County, all the way to Clodine. We even had kids coming from Houston. Harris County, coming to school here, that lived in Alief. The bus used to pick them up in the morning and bring them to school here in Missouri City.

GOODSILL: What did your dad do on the school board? Do you know what issues they were dealing with in those days?

FALSONE: He was a trustee that made sure the schools got what they needed. He was a very good member. When my dad didn't feel good, they would call him and tell him, "Oh please come to the meeting because we've got a budget here, and this and that, and we NEED your input in this budget hearing." They said, "We need to get it finalized."

Due to segregation at the time, there were other schools in the area. There was a school on Staffordshire. The school was where the Stafford bus barn and municipal building are today. There was also a school in DeWalt and Arcola that went all the way to the Brazoria County line. Down from the Dew's house in DeWalt, there was a Spanish school.

GOODSILL: Where the Dew House used to be on Highway 6?

FALSONE: Yes. It was down about a block on Oilfield Road and then it went to Steepbank. If you were turning off Highway 6, it was on the left-hand side. The mayor's mother, Mrs. Scarcella, taught school there when she first got her degree as a teacher.

The old house where I grew up was at 3019 North Main. That's where the rail yard ended. The first rail came out of Houston, I don't know what year, it was here in 1917. Came in and stopped here. All the supplies that people would order, they would pick up here. They would go down Avenue E to FM 1092, turn and go to DeWalt (to Highway 6) then go where I was just telling you, where the school was. Oilfield Road, when the road curved to the right, you'd go left to Steep Bank. You would go to the river. When you got to the river, they had a ferry there.

I remember, I must have been seven or eight years old, they had these piers. They were made out of brick. There was one on this side and one on the other side. I guess that's where they put the cables to draw the ferry across. The supplies came out of here, went to DeWalt and then went back to Richmond.

GOODSILL: That was the most direct route in those days!

FALSONE: But this is the funny thing; Mr. Joehlin told me when they extended the rail across the Brazos River to Richmond, they called the Richmond Bridge the 'swinging bridge' because it swung back and forth. That was the first bridge they put in. It must have been on wooden pilings. He said they stopped the train and asked, "Do you want to ride the train across or do you want to walk across?" They gave you the choice to ride across or you could walk across. Most people got off the train and let the train go across. Then got back on the train because they were too scared to stay on the train! That's what they told me!! (chuckles) He said they called it the 'swinging bridge.'

GOODSILL: Anything else about DeWalt or the Dew House or that area that you know about? Was there any intermingling or commerce between DeWalt and Stafford?

FALSONE: No. They had their plantation that was closed. Henry Dew was on FM 2234 out of Missouri City. He was one of three brothers. I knew him. My father knew him. We were more acquainted with him than the other two brothers.

Funny story. One of the Dew brothers owned a piece of property on the north side of Oyster Creek. He had a bunch of steers. Mr. Cangelosi, off FM 1092 and Avenue E, in that triangle more-or-less, had a corn crop. That's the way we used to feed the mules. Mr. Dew used to turn his steers out in the fall of the year and they would drift this way to Stafford. Mr. Cangelosi got tired of it and angry about it because Mr. Dew wouldn't do anything about it. Mr. Cangelosi took out his 44-40 Winchester (rifle) and went out his back door. There was no South Main back then. There was no road back there, it was all farming. He takes out his Winchester and he starts shooting them down. I'm not joking. I don't know how many he killed.

Mr. Dew filed charges on him at the courthouse. My dad was Mr. Cangelosi's lawyer and his partner. So when Mr. Cangelosi got this court order from the judge, he showed it to my dad. My dad went to the law book and looked it up, and they went to court. My dad opened the book and showed the judge and said, "It says right here you can't open range cattle and let them eat up other people's crops." The judge said, "Case dismissed," and they went home. (laughing)

GOODSILL: (laughing) Not very good for Mr. Dew!

FALSONE: The steers never came back anymore. That was the end of that.

GOODSILL: Well, that WOULD solve that problem, wouldn't it?!

FALSONE: It SOLVED it! (laughing) That was the way they did things back then. We used to get the roads graded in Stafford once a year, whether they needed it or not. (laughing)

GOODSILL: (giggling) What were the roads like? Were they pretty bad?

FALSONE: OH, Lord, they were mud roads. When I was a kid, my dad didn't like to use Main Street because it was a narrow-gauge road. It had a shoulder on it, but it had a drop-off of about 4 inches and the old cars were narrow gauge cars. If you dropped off and didn't switch back, your car would turn over.

So we used to use Stafford Road when it wasn't wet, which was a dirt road. My dad would go all the way to Bellaire Boulevard and then came out where the Warwick Hotel was (currently Hotel ZaZa, South Main, near Hermann Drive). He used to use that route all the time because of the bad roads.

My dad would pick up samples. He'd say, "Come on, boy. Let's go to the Cotton Exchange. We've got to sell some cotton." So we'd fill the back seat and fill the trunk, and we'd take off to the Cotton Exchange Building. That building is still there in downtown Houston. We'd go downtown and take the samples and I'd haul some, and my dad would haul some. We'd take them upstairs to the 3rd or 4th floor. The fellow up there sold cotton mostly overseas. He was a cotton broker. He'd sell to cotton mills making sheets, towels and clothes. He'd grade out the cotton and tell him what it was worth. I used to haul bales of cotton at night to the docks. I used to walk with a guy when they were loading the ships off Harrisburg. I'd go at night because there was no traffic. I'd leave Stafford about 11:00 at night.

GOODSILL: You'd load it up on a truck? Or trailer?

FALSONE: A truck. We'd load it up and go down there. I would unload it by myself. Nobody was around except a night watchman. Sometimes I'd take a tour with the night watchman. "Oh, come on, Joe," he'd say. "Let's walk the docks. You're not doing anything." He had to go to each little meter and wind the clock every hour. That's the way they knew he had been there, making his rounds. This was in case of fire.

GOODSILL: Things are different now.

FALSONE: Oh, yeah! It's nothing like that now. Cotton is stored in a warehouse now, and it's not stored downtown. Most of the cotton is stored in Rosenberg and Wharton.

GOODSILL: The area became more desirable for housing and buildings and less profitable to grow cotton? Was that a sad thing for you or were you ready by the time it happened?

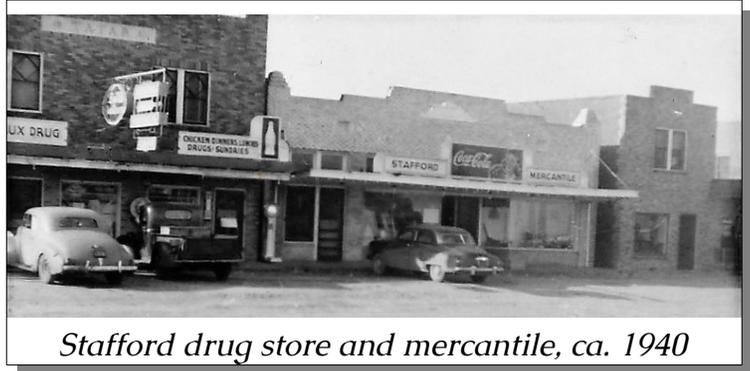
FALSONE: We sold our property in 1979. Agricultural land values used to be the same value as commercial property. There was no way you could make a crop and pay the taxes. They call it the Ag Program now.

GOODSILL: Now agricultural land is zoned at a different rate so you don't have to pay the same price?

FALSONE: Yes, the rate is lower. The valuation is the same, but the rate is lower. We sold ours the year before this went into effect. We didn't get any of the gravy, so to speak! (laughs) We sold out before then.

GOODSILL: But were you ready at that time, to get out of the business?

FALSONE: Yes, it was getting hard to pay the taxes. Our other properties had to pay the taxes on the farmland in-order-to keep it. When you took income from somewhere else in-order-to keep the land, it wasn't profitable anymore.



*Stafford drug store and mercantile, ca. 1940*

GOODSILL: Maybe you could describe to me how Stafford was different from other towns.

FALSONE: Stafford was VERY progressive. There was more business going on in Stafford, although it slowed down during the Depression. Things started picking up about 1938-1939 and in the 40s it picked up even more. Stafford was a VERY busy town. We had some gambling joints here (said *sotto voce*).

GOODSILL: (also *sotto voce*) I've heard!

EDITOR'S NOTE: According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, *sotto voce* means – 1. under the breath, in an undertone; also in a private manner. 2. very softly – used as a direction in music.

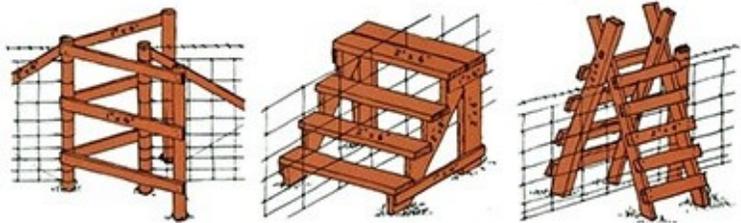
FALSONE: We had one gambling joint downtown that was there in 1936 or 1937. It burned down in January, 1953. When I was a kid, I heard shots one day in my backyard on Main Street. I heard this 'POW—POW—POW—POW'. They tell me that what happened is this: These fellows, it wasn't Clyde Barrow, but it was one of the notorious guys, I forget the name. They say that they drove up, went upstairs to the second floor and they lined everybody up against the wall. The cashier hadn't come in yet. When he did, he had two suitcases, two pistols, cowboy boots, and a great big cowboy hat. There were stairs, a landing, and a 90 degree turn that went to the top of the building.

One of the gangsters was waiting for the cashier at the top, right by the door. As the cashier walked up the stairs with the suitcases, and got to the end of the landing, the gangster came around with two pistols and said, "Put the suitcases down." The cashier said, "You ain't going to get these suitcases." So the guy shot him several times. There were two bullet holes up there. When the cashier fell back on the landing, there was no railing, and he fell to the ground.

GOODSILL: With the suitcases?

FALSONE: No, the suitcases were on the landing. He just fell. When it first happened, I was in the yard and I heard the POW—POW—POW. So I ran across my yard, across Avenue E, across the gin yard where I got to Carlos Cangelosi's place. They had a step, like a stepladder over the fence. You know, you'd climb over and go down without crossing through the fence. So I walked up on this ladder and saw the ambulance and everything. People were running here and there and everywhere. I was about half a block away from it. I was looking at policemen and all these people stirring around.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The "step ladder" referred to here is called a "stile", or a structure which provides people a passage through or over a fence or boundary via steps, ladders, or narrow gaps. --Wikipedia



GOODSILL: How old were you?

FALSONE: I must have been seven or eight years old. Sirens sounded as the crooks took off down Staffordshire and went to Blue Ridge out to Alameda Road. They never did catch them. They closed the gambling joint after that. As kids, we used to play back there. They painted over the blood stains, but they would still come through. They would repaint it gray, right on the edge of the flat board on those steps. And in a year or two, it would come through with blood stains again.

A few years later, this crime story was on a radio show called Gang Busters that came on every week. I remember another story. My daddy bought some tractor tires from Montgomery Ward. I still remember this as a kid. The salesman came to our barn in Stafford and told my dad, "I'm going to Pearland today and going to sell some tires over there."

The poor man picked up a man and a woman on the side of the road, of course it was raining, and they killed him in Pearland and put his body in one of those stacks. When they used to thresh the rice, they used to stack it and let it dry in stacks, then put it in the binder. It was not like a combine comes, it was stationery and piled here and piled there, like a haystack. They stuck him in one of those. That's where they found him. He had just been to our place.

GOODSILL: You're making it sound like a rough-and-ready place!

FALSONE: It WAS! This whole country was. Missouri City had Houston Packing Company owned by Mr. Mason. It's empty now. It was going to be developed into Tang City Mall. It was on the property behind it. They guys would bring in their cows and Mr. Mason had a packing house. They had a gambling joint over there. The guys would never get home with their money! (laughing) They'd come over and gamble!

GOODSILL: (laughing) Oh no, their poor families!

FALSONE: At the gambling joint, they used to fix some fine meals there. I went with Commissioner Johnny Davis one time, before he became County Commissioner. I was a kid, and went with him one day, and had a great meal there. It was a FINE meal. But the thing about it was when the federal men were coming out to raid them, somebody in Houston would call the place to say, "Hey! They're coming!"

There were palm trees lined up and all, and the feds would come in, and people were sitting around, just eating like they were having a party. All the stuff had folded up, it was up in the wall. The roulette wheels and all the tables folded up and then it was a flat-topped table. Everybody was sitting there, just eating. "How y'all doing?" They looked around and said, "I don't see anything here!"

GOODSILL: (chuckling) Was gambling still going on by the time you got to the age to be able to gamble?

FALSONE: Gambling was outlawed by the State by then. Every place in town had slots. This lady worked for the Sugar Refinery. She'd come in on Saturday night and go to the Blue Room Café. Mr. and Mrs. Delate owned the place. She'd buy a meal, and cash her check. She'd get her money all in quarters. She'd go in and play the slots, and we'd stand there and watch her. There was nothing else to do, you know! Where would we be going? Didn't have any cars, no gas. Wherever you went, you walked. What got us was how she spent SO much money! She HAD to win that jackpot. She'd stay there until she'd win.

GOODSILL: Did she more often win or more often just lose all of her money?

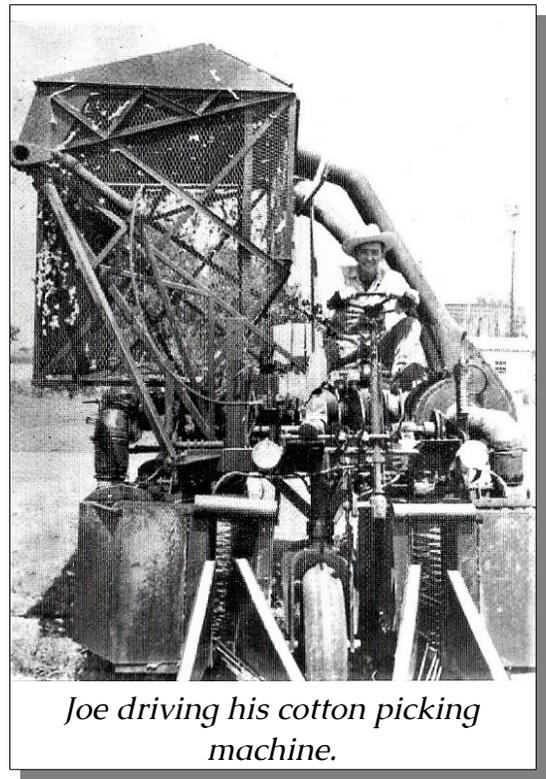
FALSONE: She lost more than the jackpot was worth.

GOODSILL: Of course! Good point!!

FALSONE: But she wouldn't quit until she hit the jackpot. We were standing there, us kids. It was a separate room from the café and the machines were lined up against the wall. She walked out to get more quarters, and one of the Ruffino boys went up there, put a quarter in and pulled, and the jackpot fell. This lady started crying. "That was MY jackpot!" Mrs. Delate got on the phone and called the slot man. He came back and filled the machine up with quarters, and she put about \$4 or \$5 worth of quarters and she hit the jackpot. He set the machine so she would get that jackpot. She never failed to be there every Saturday with her quarters.

GOODSILL: (laughing) Oh, you've told some GOOD stories! Do you have any old photos or documents that might be of interest for historic reasons? Pictures of your cotton crops or the land that you used to have or the house the way it used to be.

FALSONE: Most of my pictures are in the Stafford book. My father is in there and I'm in there with a cotton-picking machine. If I could just think of HALF of the stories! Those were the days. They were very simple.



I guess I was fourteen or fifteen years old and we got a ride to Sugar Land, over to the football field. They were having something over there. Now that's five miles from Stafford. We didn't think anything of it. We walked out and got out on Main. There weren't any cars in sight. We walked all the way from Sugar Land, past the Chevrolet place. My brother happened to be a senior in high school and he was supposed to pick us up. He was late. He picked us up after we had walked a good way. Five miles was nothing. People now will say, "I ran five miles today." When I went out for football, the coach said, "Today we're going to run five miles." I'd run my five miles.

These other kids, you know, they laid around all summer. I worked all summer, so I was ready to go! I ran those five miles and said, "Hey, Coach, what else you got for me?" He said, "Well, you can go home now and come back tomorrow." I was in shape because we worked all the time.



*Joe Falsone with Oral History committee chair  
Jane Goodsill during his interview in 2010.*

GOODSILL: It has been a pleasure to meet you and to hear your stories. Thank you for your time and energy.

*Interview ends*