

# FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

## *ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE*

Interviewee: **June Emerson Moroney**

Interview Date: 05/07/2010

Interviewer: Jane Goodsill

Transcriber: Olga Barr

Location: The Dew House, Missouri City, Texas

11 Pages



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*Transcript*

GOODSILL: Why don't we start with some of the relatives you can remember and then we work toward the present time ending with you and then your children.

MORONEY: Very good.

GOODSILL: Can you remember your grandparents?

MORONEY: I can remember my grandmother. I never knew my grandfather, Emerson Robinson. My middle name is Emerson. I was named after him. My sister's son, Justin Renshaw, has a child named Emerson as well. So Emerson's name lives on.

GOODSILL: To whom was Emerson Robinson married?

MORONEY: He was married to my grandmother, Helen May Comfort Dew. I called her Mimi. Helen May Comfort Dew was married to Emerson Randall Robinson.

GOODSILL: Who were May's sisters and brothers?

MORONEY: I never knew her brothers. In order of birth her siblings were: Lillian Dew, 1857; Hugh Saunders Dew, 1869; Richard Tristram Dew, 1871; Rueben Campbell Dew, 1874; Henry Wise Dew, 1876; George Lewis Dew, 1879; Ellen May Comfort Dew, 1883; Jesse North Dew, 1886. Jesse was my great-aunt who I loved dearly.

GOODSILL: Tell me what you remember about Ellen May Dew.

MORONEY: She didn't ever talk about this, but apparently she had to leave her mother at an early age, so I think that kind of traumatized her. I would describe her as brittle in some ways, emotionally brittle, but she was very kind at the same time, maybe not quite as sociable as my great-aunt because I think early trauma like that leaves you less able to deal with difficulties. But she was very kind to my sister and me and particularly loved my father, Robert Moroney.

GOODSILL: Tell me who the children of Emerson and May were.

MORONEY: Jessie Dew Robinson and Harold Robinson, who only lived a very short time. I see on this chart that he lived and died in 1910. So my mother, Jessie Dew Robinson, was the only child who lived. She was born in 1908 and died 1968.

GOODSILL: Tell me what you remember about your aunt, Jesse North Dew?

MORONEY: I just called her Auntie. She reminded me of Auntie Mame. She entertained a lot, and she entertained very well. She had lots of friends who would come to parties at her house, the Dew House. She was well known for her parties. They were big parties with really good food and plenty of liquor. There was a real sense of plenty and a sense of graciousness.

GOODSILL: The Dew house has been moved to Kitty Hollow Park in Missouri City in 2009. But it was originally located on the right side of Highway 6 as a person drove from Sugar Land to Missouri City. What are your memories of the house?

MORONEY: I lived in Houston with my parents in a good sized house, but it just seemed to me to be a really big house and full of all kinds of intriguing antiques. The bar was not part of the original house, the Dew Brothers added it on. When the house was moved, the bar was not moved. It was all wood and was right next the dining room. It had all the accouterments of a well-stocked bar. You could stand up to the bar itself. There was a slot machine! It was just really interesting to a young teenage girl. It had a lot of character to it.

GOODSILL: The house was a two-story house and very large?

MORONEY: It seemed really large. It looked out on the back pasture. What I LOVE about Texas is the Gulf Coast weather. I would sit with my great-aunt Jesse in that back room that she had built on. Sadly the back pasture is no longer devoted to Hereford cattle, it's a housing development. But back then you looked out and saw cattle and the creek and clouds. The clouds are so wonderful here!



*Jesse Dew North, later Agnew, was a lively entertainer whose parties were legendary.*



*The Dew House where the family entertained with lively parties serving good food and liquor, ca. 1980.*

When rainstorms came ...Gulf Coast weather is beautiful. The thunderstorms are spectacular! That was such a wonderful spot to be able to observe the weather with Auntie. We'd sit there and talk and watch television. It was be a wonderful spot!

GOODSILL: And you lived in Houston and you would come visit her how often?

MORONEY: A lot of weekends and a lot during the summer, too.

GOODSILL: What was a typical day like in the summer?

MORONEY: Well, I would often go riding. I don't know how I did this because it was SO HOT and humid but I guess I acclimated to that. I would go catch my horse or somebody, the somebody was often Slim, who was married to the woman who cooked for my aunt. I would go on long rides, often by myself, just me, my horse, and the dog.

Occasionally a friend from Houston would go with me. We'd go out in the back pasture or possibly down Oilfield Road down to the Brazos River. It was a great adventure because that really felt very distant. It felt as though you were going back in time. It felt as though you were going very far from Highway 6 and far from the twentieth century.

GOODSILL: About what year was this would you say?

MORONEY: 1950s. There were fences with gates, but they weren't locked. I'd just get off my horse and open the gates and close them behind me and then get back on the horse.

GOODSILL: You had a tremendous amount of freedom?

MORONEY: HUGE FREEDOM. I remember going down to the Brazos River bottoms that belonged to Grandmother Mimi. I had to have a key to go down there because it was locked. I would go through the oil field where there were gas flares. I would take a key, open that gate and then continue on down the road. That was a feeling of really going back in time because there were so few people.

GOODSILL: What was the land and the river bottom used for?

MORONEY: Well, I think it was pastureland that belonged to my grandmother. It was part of the Dew Plantation.

GOODSILL: Tell us about the Dew Plantation.



MORONEY: I don't even know the full extent of it. My great-aunt's ranch was 700 acres. My grandmother's was several hundred acres. They were pretty large areas of land and had all been part of this Dew Plantation. You know I'm not sure of the total acreage. They had cattle and cotton. Then at a later date they had oil.

When they had the dedication of the relocated refurbished Dew House, there was a man who created a stained glass window. In it he had some of the different economic parts that contributed to their plantation; oil, cotton, and cattle.

GOODSILL: When your great-aunt Jesse was living at the Dew House, what was her life like? Could you tell us what a typical day might have been for her?

MORONEY: Well I think she would get up and she had this contraption, a bell that she would ring. There was a servant-friend, Nancy Woods, who lived in a house close by, maybe on an adjoining parcel. Nancy still works for my sister, [Muffie](#), in Houston.



*Stained glass window created and donated by Ed Schwer for the Dew House in Kitty Hollow Park, Missouri City.*

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please read the interview by Nancy Woods on this website at <https://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/home/showdocument?id=45528>

Originally she was literally a servant, she was really more of a friend. Auntie would ring Nancy to come in and help her get up. Effie, her cook, would make breakfast for her down in the kitchen. Jesse had a really huge beautiful rose garden. She'd work in her rose garden. She would do business relating to her cattle. She bought and sold cattle, but she mostly sold cattle. She had, I think, twelve bulls, and I don't remember how many cows. She had a foreman and she talked to him. She had friends, and she talked to them. She played cards. She invited my sister and me or my mother to come out, but not during the week because we went to school.

GOODSILL: This is what her life was like around 1950 that you remember? You'd come out and you'd have freedom to go wherever you wanted and to ride your horse to the river bottom?

MORONEY: Yes. I remember having girlfriends come out and visit and have slumber parties.

GOODSILL: Tell me what you remember about spending the night in the house as a child.

MORONEY: Well, I spent the night in the bedroom closest to Auntie's. We'd stay up, sometimes pretty late, and just talk and sit in her sitting room that was next to her bedroom and watch TV.

Eventually I'd go to bed and then wake up; this was a luxury for me, that is. Nancy would come in, this is during the winter, and light a gas stove in the bathroom, so that the bathroom would be warm when I got up. Can you imagine that?

GOODSILL: That sounds wonderful.

MORONEY: It's wonderful for me, but a big imposition for her. [laughs] The warmth would spread into the room where I slept. I have known Nancy since childhood.

GOODSILL: How old a woman is she now?

MORONEY: Okay I'm sixty-two, so she is older than me—you know I'm not sure how old she is.

GOODSILL: She's a black woman. Did her family work for your family several generations back?

MORONEY: Yes.

GOODSILL: Would she help Aunt Jesse at the big occasions that your grandmother had at the house?

MORONEY: Yeah, she would. She would serve food, and she would cook sometimes. She still helps my sister cook.

GOODSILL: At the opening of the Dew House in its new location in 2009 I talked with Nancy. I said, "I understand that Jesse had a lot parties out here." She said, "Oh, my yes." "Did you help her put on the parties?" "Oh, Yes." I said, "What did you do?" She said, "Well, I did everything." I said, "Did they have fine china and silver and glassware?" "Oh, yes. We got it all out for the parties."

I saw a picture of Jesse somewhere in the house. She was wearing a beaded black cocktail dress. I said, "It looked like she was so well dressed. Did she have nice clothes?" "Oh," Nancy said, "She had the most beautiful clothes of anybody around."

MORONEY: Yeah, she had really good taste, and she wore really pretty clothes. She looked like a grand dame.

GOODSILL: Ah, that gives us the idea of her, doesn't it?

MORONEY: YES. She really looked like a grand dame. And so here she was having these wonderful parties served by Nancy. It wasn't like now days where you think of French cuisine being fancy food. This was just a combination of American cuisine and black cooking. It was really good!

GOODSILL: I bet it was. At some point I know there's a family story about a parrot that lived in the house. Do you have any memories of the parrot?

MORONEY: That parrot! She had her own wooden house outside. It was quite large. She lived out there in the warmer months. In the winter months she had a rather large metal house that was inside. She didn't seem to like anybody but my aunt. She actually lunged and bit at you. Polly was quite old. She repeated the names of people that my aunt had called out including the names of people who were long since gone. I remember she would say, "This is not somebody that was long gone." She would say, "George Wayne or Debra." These are Nancy Wood's son and daughter. Polly would imitate my auntie's calling out for these people [laughs] and other people who were long gone. She was like this alter ego of my aunt.

A day or two after my aunt died Polly became entangled in something in her outdoor cage and she just sort of hung herself. She died. She was this really old parrot. I think she was like fifty or sixty, I don't know. Parrots live to be pretty old. She just strangely ended up killing herself, somehow accidentally dying within days after Auntie died. She just was not going to be around anymore after the last of the Dews wasn't around anymore.

GOODSILL: Well, there's another character or person who gets named sometimes, Aunt Ruth Molly (Dew). I wonder if you could tell us about her.

MORONEY: She also was a really good entertainer and she was very nice to me.

GOODSILL: What was her relationship to you?

MORONEY: She was a half-sister. She was descended from Alice Miller. She was the other marriage of Thomas Tristram Dew. Ruth Dew died in 1993. She was also very jovial.

GOODSILL: Where did she live?

MORONEY: She lived down Highway 6. She had a smaller parcel. I think her house is still there. It sits back kind of towards the creek. She would give really good parties with really good food. [laughs]

GOODSILL: In those days they knew how to entertain. It was sort of a cultural thing from their time period, wasn't it?

MORONEY: It was! She gave really good parties. She was married to Walter Lowley. He was known somehow as being kind of grouchy. I ended up meeting him a few times and he seemed to be pretty jovial. I don't know how the family story got started that he was kind of grouchy.

GOODSILL: Who knows who you may have heard talking?

MORONEY: I think it was my mother and my grandmother. They must have gotten into some fight about something. But he seemed nice enough when I talked to him.

GOODSILL: Emerson Randall Robinson married Ellen May Dew, and they had your mother, Jessie Dew Robinson.

MORONEY: Yes. She was a study in contrast. She grew up riding horses in a country atmosphere. But she also went to Rice and became pretty sophisticated. She ended up becoming an interior decorator. Some of the antiques in my great-aunt's house were chosen by my mother who ended up being pretty knowledgeable about different periods of furniture and styles. So she was a real mixture of the salt of the earth and sophistication.

GOODSILL: Good description. She lived in Houston in her grown years?

MORONEY: Yes. She was married to my father, Robert Emmett Moroney.

GOODSILL: How many children did they have?

MORONEY: Just two! Muffie Linda Lelia Susan Moroney and me, June Emerson Moroney.

GOODSILL: Anything we need to know about your father?



MORONEY: He was a wonderful person. I think everybody loved him, black and white. He was just a really good person. He had a great sense of humor, kind of a mischievous sense of humor, just a real sweetheart.

GOODSILL: What kind of business was he in?

MORONEY: Stocks and bonds. [laughs] It doesn't sound like it would go with being a real sweetheart. He a really smart man. But he also had this kind of mischievous sense of humor. He was also a good businessman. There were times when my mother could be really hard on my sister and me. He would say, "Well, just kind of ease down JESS." He had a good sense of kindness and justice.

GOODSILL: Does Muffie have any children?

MORONEY: She does. She has two, Robert and Justin Renshaw. They both live in Houston.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please read the interview by Linda "Muffie" Moroney on this website at <https://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/home/showdocument?id=42954>

GOODSILL: Are either one of them interested in the history of the family or genealogy?

MORONEY: I think they both are. They both are interested in this house. Robert is particularly interested in the Houston Fat Stock Show and Rodeo and has been very active in it.

GOODSILL: The Dew family goes way back with their involvement with it, right?

MORONEY: Yes.

GOODSILL: What are your children's names?

MORONEY: Michael Nicholas Kunz, born in 1981, Robinson Moroney Kunz, born in 1983, and Kathryn Moroney Kunz born in 1988.

GOODSILL: Are you pleased with the way they have relocated and restored the house?

MORONEY: Oh, I am really pleased. It's not in the original spot and I miss those wonderful trees. Like the picture I'm looking at, look at those oaks and magnolias! But in some ways the new spot is even better because of the nice little lakes and birds in Kitty Hollow Park. I think the renovations have been really good.

It's a little surprising and strange to look out the windows and see different views, a little disorienting because for so long I would look out the windows and see the same views. But Highway 6 was always a disruptive presence. I always had a sense of danger from it because of the cars whizzing by. I've lost more than one dog to that speed-o-rama. The location is better now.

GOODSILL: Is there anything I should have asked?

MORONEY: I didn't realize that Aunt Faye was adopted from a former marriage. I didn't realize that. That's my mother's handwriting on the chart. Who made this chart?

GOODSILL: I don't know.

MORONEY: But I'm grateful to whoever did it because I learned some things.

GOODSILL: I see in my notes that your grandfather, Emerson Robinson, had a store. I don't know if you had any memories of that store or not.

MORONEY: Very, very vague. I must have been really small. I think it was just sort of a general merchandise store. I remember the store or maybe I'm just creating it in my mind, I remember wood floors. I think it was a post office, too.

GOODSILL: This is what I have written down in some notes that Diane Ware gave me. Emerson Robinson owned the first Missouri City post office. It was in a store on FM 2234 and 90A. The grandfather was involved with county politics. He was a Jaybird leader and he was active in schools.

MORONEY: Yeah, the Jaybirds. I think he wrote the constitution for the Jaybirds, which is really awful because one of the things they did was keep black people from voting in primaries. What is so weird is that Nancy remembers him being charming and nice. On an individual level he could be charming to black people and at the same time be trying to disenfranchise them. What a weird combination. This is my own grandfather, for Pete's sake.

GOODSILL: Sometimes it's shocking.

MORONEY: It is shocking, but it was probably very typical for his time, well a white person for his time. Well, there is nothing to be done about that.

GOODSILL: We've covered all the things I had on my list and I've enjoyed talking to you very much, June.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Jaybird–Woodpecker War (1888–89) was a feud between two United States Democratic Party factions fighting for political control of Fort Bend County, Texas, in the southeast part of the state. The Woodpeckers (many of whom had been Republican during Reconstruction) included a number of whites and virtually the entire African-American population of the county. The Woodpeckers had controlled the county government by winning elections since the Reconstruction Era. The Jaybird faction, which included a majority of the white population in the county, wanted to oust blacks and their white allies from the county administration. Murders were committed against persons in each faction in 1888 and 1889.

On August 16, 1889, a gunfight broke out at the county courthouse, in which four persons were killed, including the sheriff. The Jaybirds won the fight and seized control of the county government soon afterward, with the collaboration of Governor Lawrence Sullivan Ross, who established martial law in the county. The effects of the Post-Reconstruction feud echoed in local politics for decades. The Jaybirds effectively disfranchised the African Americans in the county by using a "whites-only" ballot in preliminary party voting from 1889 until 1953, when the United States Supreme Court ruled that this was unconstitutional. --Wikipedia

MORONEY: I'm very glad that we connected and that you invited me be interviewed.

Interview ends