

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewees: **Marjorie Bidwell Rozelle**

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Interviewer: Diane Ware

Transcriber: Marsha Smith

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Marjorie Bidwell Rozelle

Transcript

WARE: I want to start with some biographical information. When and where were you born?

ROZELLE: I was born in Louisiana, in my grandmother's home. We had to cross a railroad track and see the sign Pawnee to know how to get there. It was close to Glenmora, Louisiana. We lived there for quite a while, with my grandmother, and then eventually my dad got a job in Houston. We moved to Harrisburg where he had a sister living there. About 1929 we moved to DeWalt.

WARE: Tell me about your father. What brought him to DeWalt?

ROZELLE: A job with Dew and Hutchings. I think Mr. Hutchings operated the ranching part of it. And he was hired as the general manager and bookkeeper of the general store as well as the postmaster. He had an assistant; Mr. E. B. Smith but dad ordered everything. I don't remember it, but my sister said they had a big garage next to the store, and they'd had to go out and sell gas! (laughs) It was the only store in the area.

WARE: Did the Smiths live in that area?

ROZELLE: Yes, they lived next door to us. I guess you'd call it a company house. There were about four houses in the area that we lived in, and then there was a vacant lot which someone later built a home on. I don't remember what year. And then there was the Hutchings house, which was a beautiful, large home. And then on down the way was the Dew home. And then, across the railroad tracks from us, which was the side that the store was on, I would say there could be a half a dozen houses, maybe nine that people lived in that worked in the area. I suppose some of them on the ranch. I don't know where the Negro people lived, maybe around Oilfield Road. I know their church was there.

WARE: What sort of things did your father do for leisure?

ROZELLE: (chuckles) Bless his heart, he didn't HAVE much leisure with four girls and then later, the two boys! But he was a wonderful dad. He would take us to Galveston. Doing things with his children was his leisure. I don't know how he did it but after I got in high school, he drove to the Heights for me to have a music-voice lesson. It was a school of music and they played with the symphony. I wanted to sing popular music and the teacher wanted me to sing opera music.

Daddy would drive me in there once a week for a lesson. Of course, we didn't have a LOT of money. One year they gave me a scholarship. I don't know why because my voice wasn't that good for sure! (chuckles) There was a greyhound racetrack in Stafford and sometimes he would go and sell tickets for that. One time he let us go watch the greyhounds run.

He would take us to a movie in Houston. We used to see those stage shows. And he was a wonderful father to do all of that! That's how he spent the leisure time he had.

WARE: Tell me about your mother?

ROZELLE: She was a most loving person. If there were some little Negro children around in the yard playing with us and we got cookies, then they got cookies. We were treated alike. She tried to sew some clothes for us girls (laughs). She didn't have any outside activities until we started going to the Baptist Church in Sugar Land. She'd get together with some of the ladies.

WARE: Did many people come in from DeWalt to attend church in Sugar Land?

ROZELLE: No. Some of them came to the Sugar Land School. We didn't get to because we didn't have transportation. Although we had a choice, if we had transportation to get to Sugar Land. But we had to go to Missouri City school because they sent a bus out. But the Hutchings and the Seniors children who lived further out had a way to get to Sugar Land. But they didn't have room for us.



Marjorie with a painting of the Sugar Land School

So, we ended up going to Missouri City to school. Later, when I was able to drive, we went to the Baptist church and I became involved with a lot of Sugar Land girls and boys. We had some very good times. I graduated in '38 from Missouri City, and then in 1940, T. C. and I married. About that time, the Dew was shutting down their operations and Daddy had to find work. We couldn't find anything for him in Sugar Land, so they moved back to the Heights. He tried to open a store himself, but was not successful. You have to have money to make money. He didn't. So he had a pretty hard time the rest of his life.

WARE: So in 1940 they closed the store completely?

ROZELLE: As far as I know. I left in May so I assume they were just shutting down their operations.

WARE: Tell me a little bit more about that store in DeWalt. What kind of items did they carry?

ROZELLE: It was mostly grocery items. I remember Antonio Arriaga, the butcher. He lived in one of those houses close to the store. We had the meat market, all kinds of canned goods and just what you stock in a regular grocery store. I don't remember if they had clothing but maybe bolts of cloth. I didn't pay that much attention.

WARE: Right! What was your mother's name?

ROZELLE: Mattie Elma Elliott.

WARE: Now we had mentioned once before that Bertha Davis told me that her mother, Daisy Pickett, had worked for your mother. Did a lot of people have help in the home? Tell me the sorts of things that Daisy would do for your family.

ROZELLE: I know the Hutchings had help and I think Daisy was a cook for them. She made the best French fries! I managed to be over there some times just to taste some fries! Mother didn't have a LOT of help in the house. I just hope Daisy was there when the boys were born, but I don't know. They sent us to Louisiana before the first birth, I think. The second, we were home. Mother didn't have a cook but maybe Daisy washed some clothes for us. We had one man named Garbill who did work around the yard. I remember Garbill standing with his hoe propped up under his chin and his hands on it taking a nap while standing up! (laughing)

WARE: Quite a feat! (laughing) Where were your brothers born?

ROZELLE: They were both born in the house at DeWalt. The doctor did not get there in time for both births which were a year apart. It was after the fact that Dr. Carlos A. Slaughter arrived from Sugar Land.

WARE: How was the medical care out in DeWalt? Did you have any doctors or anything nearby?

ROZELLE: Nope. They had a one-room schoolhouse and we had a teacher. I must have been in the fourth grade when we first moved to DeWalt. Then we had to go to Missouri City for maybe sixth or seventh grade. It was way back then! But we didn't have any provisions for extras, like health or doctors.

WARE: Tell me about the one-room school house.

ROZELLE: The thing I remember was when we got the itch in our fingers, we'd have to get sulfur to treat it. We had a lot of Mexican people living in the small area where we lived.

WARE: The Mexican children went to school with you?

ROZELLE: Oh, yes, but not the Negro children. I guess all grades, first through fourth, were taught in that one room. It was very primitive.

WARE: Did your parents raise a garden? Keep any farm animals themselves?

ROZELLE: No, we got all our food at the grocery store. On birthdays, if Daddy knew there was something special we wanted, he would order it through a catalog in the store. At Christmas time, he would bring treats such as candy, oranges, and other fruit. I remember he ordered me a bracelet one time, and it had a birthstone in it. Somehow, I broke that stone and was heartbroken. That was my most prized possession.

WARE: So the one gift at Christmas was a special gift, not a necessity?

ROZELLE: Yes, the one thing we wanted, he tried to get for us.

WARE: Tell me, when you weren't in school and it was summertime, what did you and your sisters and brothers do for fun?

ROZELLE: The Hutchings family had a wonderful library and they loaned us books. We read all the Nancy Drew and the Little Colonel books. We did a lot of reading. Their son, George Stokes, who was my age, would read to us sometimes at their house. We played games with the neighborhood children such as Red Rover-Red Rover Let Somebody Come Over and Pop the Whip. I remember being on the end one time when we were playing Pop the Whip and there was a dog who caught me on the arm and BIT me! Daddy had to take me to a Bellaire hospital regularly for twenty-one shots in my stomach for rabies! I don't remember whether they got the dog tested or if somebody shot him.

WARE: So the closest hospital at that time was in Bellaire?

ROZELLE,: Yeah, I guess, to give those injections. I don't know whether they had Sugar Land Hospital in the '30s. We spent a lot of time reading and visiting with the kids in the neighborhood.

WARE: The Hutchings family had a large library in their home?

ROZELLE: Well, they had lots of books. Robbie Louise, Charlene and George Stokes all went to college and they were all expert horse riders. Mrs. Hutchings was a beautiful woman and would have her white jodhpurs to go riding.

One summer, George Stokes went down to the Brazos River to cut some mistletoe for his mother for Christmas. As he was cutting the mistletoe, the knife slipped and cut his eye. He rode that horse all the way home in order to get to a hospital. He was blinded in that one eye. After that, he graduated from A & M and became a sharpshooter. (chuckles)

WARE: They had just the three children: Robbie Louise, Charlene and George Stokes?

ROZELLE: Yes. I can't remember where the Hutchings family moved. Maybe to Barker? I'm not sure. The Smiths and the Chapmans were gone which is why I figure they shut everything down.

WARE: What about the Dew family?

ROZELLE: I never was really close to anybody in the Dew family. I knew Mrs. Agnew and I knew Miss Calloway, but did not visit with them. I just knew they lived in the big house! (laughing)

WARE: Sounds like the Hutchings home may have been a big house, too.

ROZELLE: It was nice. It had a veranda around it. I figured since he was a partner and was hired to oversee the ranching and the store, that maybe it was built big.

WARE: Was there any church at all in your community that you went to?

ROZELLE: No, just the Negro church but I don't remember the name. It certainly needs to be preserved. Maybe Bertha might know something.

WARE: You mentioned that the Hutchings had horses, did they raise cattle?

ROZELLE: No, they just had horses to ride. I don't remember where they kept them. Maybe behind their house. There was a lot of land behind us and the little old creek.

WARE: Name some of the other children that lived around that you played with.

ROZELLE: The Chapmans had no children. There was a mother and a grown daughter that lived there but I don't remember their names. I remember Mr. and Mrs. E. B. Smith who had a son named Alonzo and a daughter named Jean. Alonzo had a convertible and gave us a ride in his rumble seat to see our aunt who lived on Broadway out in Harrisburg. (laughing)

WARE: Pretty classy! Did you ever buy things from the store or did just your mother do all the shopping?

ROZELLE: Just my mother and dad. My sister, Norma, who was 1 ½ years younger than I, worked in the store sometimes to help Dad. I mean, she was sharp! She was in high school and could sell things, do the shopping and bring it home. I don't remember ever doing the shopping.

WARE: Do you recall any special community activities out in the DeWalt area?

ROZELLE: No. We had nothing. We really weren't a community. I'm thinking maybe one of the families that lived there worked for the prison system, Elmer Smith. There weren't too many children our age. When I got in high school, there was one good friend that lived further out near the Brazos River. She would ride in, sometimes on a horse, and we'd get to play together.

WARE: How far away was the school in Missouri City and does it still exist?

ROZELLE: I am NOT good at guessing distances. They built around it and added the gymnasium. They had the gym when I went there, because we used to go to school dances in that gym when I got into high school.

WARE: Did a bus come and pick you up and how long did it take you to get to school?

ROZELLE: Yes. I would say about fifteen or twenty minutes.

WARE: How often did you get into Richmond or Sugar Land or Houston?

ROZELLE: We got into Houston more often than we did Sugar Land or Richmond. I don't ever remember having to go to Richmond for anything.

WARE: Could anyone ride the train?

ROZELLE: There was a railroad through DeWalt which was going to Sugar Land and Richmond but not for traveling.

WARE: Do you remember seeing them load those trains in DeWalt?

ROZELLE: I don't remember it. I know they had potato sheds but I don't know what they did with them.

WARE: What types of crops did they grow out there that you remember?

ROZELLE: Maybe cotton? I remember trying to pick cotton for fun so it must have been somewhere nearby.

WARE: How did the Great Depression of the 1930s affect your family and that community?

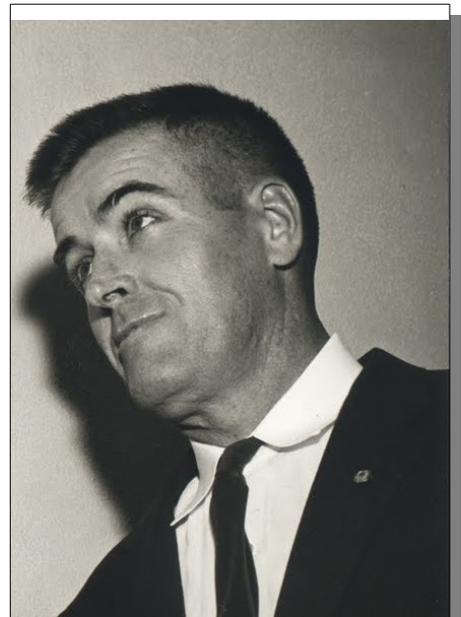
ROZELLE: I don't know if we realized we were poor! Because we always seemed to have food. We couldn't have the extra clothing that we wanted. I had a good friend that would loan me one of her evening gowns if we went to the school for something special. But we always had plenty to eat. We might have eaten a lot of dried beans like everybody else did but I don't think we were really too aware. I'm sure our daddy was!

WARE: Do you remember families moving in and out of the area a lot?

ROZELLE: No. There were so few there and they stayed.

WARE: When and why did you move to Sugar Land?

ROZELLE: I had been dating T. C. Rozelle in 1938 after I graduated. On our first date, we went to a movie in Rosenberg, the Cole Theater. On our way home, we stopped at a little café that had a juke box. We bought a Coke and danced. We had double-dated with another couple. He said he went home and told his mother that he had met the girl that someday he was going to marry! And he didn't give up. I think I had a date with George Stokes after T. C. and I had dated, but that was it. He took up my time all the other times. (laughing). He was so well-known among the kids, even though he was five years older than I was. They admired him and loved him.



T. C. Rozelle, July 31, 1959

You could tell what a wonderful person he was. On June 22, 1940 we married in the Baptist Church, the old frame building here in Sugar Land. And that's how I became a Sugar Lander.

WARE: I believe T. C. told me he did two tours of duty. Is that correct?

ROZELLE: Yes, he did. After he graduated from high school, he served four years in the Navy. Then came home and that's when I met him, after he'd gotten out of the service. When World War II started he was one of the first ones called up because his number was picked. So he said, "Well, I'm going BACK in the Navy". So they took him right away and put him on a supply ship to the Pacific. I don't remember the date. He served on two different ships, the Cassiopeia and the Caledonia with the rank of Chief Petty Officer. He did all the buying of supplies for the ship. So that's what he did until the war was over and he was discharged and came home in '45.

WARE: After your dad left the DeWalt area in 1940, where did your brothers and sisters go?

ROZELLE: With him. They were still living with them.

WARE: When you were small and living in DeWalt, how did your family celebrate Christmas or Thanksgiving? Did you have any special traditions?

ROZELLE: Not really. I remember my daddy would have a good cigar! That's the only time I ever saw him smoke; after a Thanksgiving or Christmas meal. But the traditions were chocolate drops with white filing that he would bring from the store. That was our favorite. And the fruit. We enjoyed getting fruit. And I remember when Fritos became available. Oh, I loved Fritos! (laughs) Christmas and Thanksgiving was just the traditional things. You'd get up the next morning and Santa Claus had been there.

WARE: Do you have photographs or old documents that I could borrow to copy for the museum? Photos of your parents, photos from your family when you were a child, those type of things, at the period that you were living in that area?

ROZELLE: I have some of me sitting in overalls and my little brother in a red rocker.

WARE: Yes, those are perfect, at the period that you lived out there. I would like to borrow those when you get a chance. Can you think of anyone else that I should interview about that area? You mentioned Bertha Davis.

ROZELLE: I was trying to think of some of the boys' names. Little Eddie, a Negro came to here in Sugar Land.

WARE: Bertha might be able to help me with some of that.

ROZELLE: Talk to Norma and Don. Billie has Alzheimer's.

WARE: Are any of the Hutchings still living?

ROZELLE: Maybe Robbie Louise or Charlene but I don't know who Charlene married. Robbie Louise married a Jones.

WARE: Is there anything else that I haven't asked you about when you lived in DeWalt? Any memorable things that happened or just things that stand out in your memory from your childhood, when you lived out there?

ROZELLE: I'm sorry to say I can't think of anything memorable. It was just a place to live and go to school and get to church. Nothing was ever presented by any organization or anything for us. It was just an ordinary place to live. Robbie Louise used to write us letters about her initiation into a sorority. It was hilarious. She could really describe events.

WARE: Did you keep any of those letters?

ROZELLE: No, I didn't.

WARE: What was the age difference between you and Robbie Louise?

ROZELLE: A number of years. George Stokes was their youngest and then Charlene and Robbie Louise were the oldest. She lived in Dallas but I can't remember what his name was. Charlene, I think after she got out of college, was a weather forecaster or weatherperson. I lost all contact with them because they were older. And I never knew what happened to Mr. and Mrs. Hutchings.

George Stokes, moved to Brushy Creek in Palestine (Texas). He married a woman with children and had a dairy there. I have a letter from him because I had called him on the phone when T. C. and I would go visit our friends who lived in Gilmer. He told me how to get there. Well, we went but there was this big dairy place and it was fenced in and had a gate. We couldn't get in! So we went home.

I wrote him a letter. He said I was on the other side of the road, behind the trees and the bushes! (laughing) I had the wrong place! So I never did get to see him but he wrote a nice letter telling me he had married this wonderful lady and her children. In other words, he was just really happy. He was nice. I've got his obituary.

WARE: I would love a copy. You were describing the DeWalt house you lived in.

ROZELLE: As far as a description, I would say it was just an ordinary house for those times. It was up off the ground on blocks with steps going up into the little porch entry. It had a living room with a fireplace, three bedrooms which we were kind of crowded in and a kitchen. We had an outhouse as long as I can remember. I'm sure we eventually got some indoor plumbing.

WARE: Was your house typical for the area? Do you know of anyone that had indoor plumbing?

ROZELLE: Yes, I'm sure the Hutchings and the Dews (laughing) did. I think we did get indoor plumbing later, but I can remember going to the outhouse. It was painted and when the paint wore off, it didn't get repainted.

WARE: What about the kitchen? What type of appliances did your mother have in the kitchen?

ROZELLE: Just the minimum. She didn't have a mixer or anything like that. All she had was her bowls, and I've got one of her wooden bowls. And we just had ordinary silverware.

WARE: What type of stove and refrigerator?

ROZELLE: We probably had an ice box. I guess we got ice. I don't remember having a refrigerator. I don't remember what the stove looked like! I was not a very observant child!

WARE: You didn't have to do the cooking so you didn't observe.

ROZELLE: That's right! I should have and she should have taught me! Poor Mom, she did everything. I guess I grew up lazy (laughing).

WARE: Do you think she had a wood stove? Did they put wood in it?

ROZELLE: Probably. It certainly wasn't gas or electric. I can remember one time after a rain, that we kids caught a tubful of craw fish. We boiled them in a can and ate them, tails and all. We couldn't stop catching craw fish. And that was just fun for us. I don't remember whether they came up out of little holes or how we got them. We had a little creek behind our house and I just remember the tubful. Maybe somebody was helping us, like other kids. That sort of stuck in my mind.

WARE: Thank you.