

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSIONER
ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Robert Rogers**
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Interviewer: Karl Baumgartner
Transcriber: Sylvia Vacek
Location: Fulshear, Texas
Comments from: Zerlean James, Lorena Tillis, Clara Mae Sneed
and Ozay Rogers

32 Pages



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BAUMGARTNER: My name is Karl Baumgartner, today is July 31, 2019, and I am interviewing Mr. Robert Rogers in Fulshear, Texas on behalf of the Fort Bend County Historical Commission. By way of introduction, Mr. Rogers and his parents and grandparents were natives of Fulshear and his life encompasses a remarkable swath of history for Fort Bend County. "The Greatest Generation" by newscaster/author Tom Brokaw famously describes a generation of Americans who grew up in the 1920's and 1930's and were called into World War II. Mr. Rogers' life and values - his work ethic and determination to overcome obstacles, service to the country, focus on the family - exemplify the ethics of the era.

Mr. Rogers what is your full legal name?

ROGERS: Robert Rogers.

BAUMGARTNER: Robert Rogers, no middle name. Can you give me your age and your date of birth?

ROGERS: 97 years old. I will be 98 next Saturday. My date of birth was August 10, 1921, though that is not the date shown on my birth papers. It shows 1/05/22.

BAUMGARTNER: Like on your birth certificate, but that was not correct?

ROGERS: No, it wasn't.

BAUMGARTNER: I would like to note here that accompanying us today are four members of your family. Two sisters Lorena Tillis and Clara Mae Sneed, a brother Ozay Rogers and first cousin Zerlean James. All born in Fulshear over eighty years ago.

Where were you born?

ROGERS: Fort Bend County here in Fulshear, Texas.

BAUMGARTNER: You were born at home?

ROGERS: Yes, born at home; we had midwives then.

BAUMGARTNER: How long had your family lived in the Fulshear area?

ROGERS: We were born here and we lived here all our life until the end of the World War II, when we moved as a family to Houston. My parents, my brothers and sisters, and my grandparents all were from here.

BAUMGARTNER: Let's talk about your family first and then we will talk about Fulshear the way it used to be, and the changes and what it was like growing up here in those days.

What were your mom and dad's names?

ROGERS: Dennis Rogers and Emma Brantley.

BAUMGARTNER: When were they born?

ROGERS: My dad was born in 1898 and my mom was born in 1900.

BAUMGARTNER: And your grandparents lived here also?

ROGERS: Yes. Their names were Frank Rogers and Harriet Rogers, my grandfather and my grandmother.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you have the names of any distant relatives further back than that?

ROGERS: No, that is as far as I can go.

BAUMGARTNER: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

ROGERS: There were eight of us. Should I name them?

BAUMGARTNER: Please.

ROGERS: In order, Robert Rogers, L.C. Rogers, was the second...

BAUMGARTNER: You are the oldest?

ROGERS: I am the oldest. Dennis Rogers, Jr. he was the third, Lily Rogers was the fourth and after Lily it was Lorena, sitting right here, and after Lorene a girl named Lula, and after Lula, my brother Ozay, and after Ozay, Clara Mae.

BAUMGARTNER: So, Clara Mae is the baby. Clara Mae, how old are you?

SISTER CLARA MAE: Eighty-two.

ROGERS: Most of us are about two years apart.

BAUMGARTNER: How many are still living?

ROGERS: Four have passed away.

BAUMGARTNER: You lived around here growing up?

ROGERS: On the farm. On Hunter Harris' Farm.

BAUMGARTNER: I guess that was out of town?

ROGERS: Yes. It is about five miles up the road between Fulshear and Simonton, I don't know what the highway number is.

LORENA: FM 1093.

BAUMGARTNER: What did your family do?

ROGERS: We lived and worked on the farm. Share crop.

BAUMGARTNER: Could you explain what share cropping means?

ROGERS: My daddy got half of the crop that was grown.

BAUMGARTNER: OK, he received half of the crop for his work and the land owner got the other half for his property ownership. What did he farm?

ROGERS: Cotton and corn, mainly. We weren't the only family living there.

BAUMGARTNER: You had other kinfolks that lived out there?

ROGERS: Yes. All of my dad's brothers and sisters lived out there. There were a bunch of families.

BAUMGARTNER: It was really like a community.

ROGERS: Yes.

BAUMGARTNER: One of the things that we try and do in these interviews is to see how things have changed since your birth.

ROGERS: You cannot compare that with how people are living now. It is so altogether different.

LIVING ON THE FARM

BAUMGARTNER: Did your dad live there all his life?

ROGERS: Yes. Forty-six years.

BAUMGARTNER: Your brothers and sisters, did you all grow up on the farm?

ROGERS: Yes. All of us were raised there. We all worked on the farm.

BAUMGARTNER: What was that like? You must have gotten lots of chores when you were a little boy.

ROGERS: Cotton was the main crop. Chopping and picking cotton. Chopping with a hoe when the crop was small and when it grew then you would pick it.



Picking cotton by hand.

BAUMGARTNER: Picking, you have to get out in the field and bend over. Which is harder, chopping or picking?

ROGERS: Picking is always harder because it is hard on your back because you were bent over. Once you pick you put it in a sack and you had to drag it along behind you.

BAUMGARTNER: I guess you planted in the spring and you had to take care of it in the summertime and into the fall.

ROGERS: Then you take it to the gin.

BAUMGARTNER: Did everybody pick cotton?

ROGERS: Yes. Everybody did the same thing. We picked in September, then school would start.

BAUMGARTNER: Did all the kids work in the fields?

ROGERS: Yes. They went to the field when they were little and if they didn't work, they

would sit under the shade tree. They would sit under the shade tree if they were too young to work.

BAUMGARTNER: So how old were they when they were big enough to work?

ROGERS: Five or six. I was seven when my granddaddy made me a chopping hoe. He lived on the farm too.

BAUMGARTNER: How did he make a chopping hoe?

ROGERS: My uncle made it. We had a blacksmith shop out there on the place. He was the blacksmith. My granddaddy, Frank Rogers, lived to be 105. He was raised on the Harris farm too. That was my daddy's daddy.

BAUMGARTNER: Do you know when he was born?

ROGERS: I don't know the date. He was born in slave times.

BAUMGARTNER: Really! Did he ever talk about anything or any of those years?

ROGERS: He used to tell us that when he was a boy and the slave people used to drive the wagon and gather peaches for the hogs. He used to ride on the wagon with them, my granddaddy, with the slave people...

BAUMGARTNER: Were they still slave people then, or you do not know if the Civil War was over?

ROGERS: He passed away in about 1950. He was a boy in Civil War days. By the time I came along my granddaddy had a big family. They had nine children.

BAUMGARTNER: Were there peaches around here when you were growing up?

ROGERS: Oh yes. That is what we ate, peaches.

BAUMGARTNER: How many people lived out on the place?

ROGERS: It was a big farm and there was my daddy's house, my auntie's house, my other auntie's house, and then my other uncle's house, my granddaddy's house. Where we were raised at there were about seven houses on the farm together.

BAUMGARTNER: It was like a community.

ROGERS: Yeah. Ever since I got big enough to remember, my Uncle Robert was the

blacksmith, he would do the blacksmith jobs for the farm. He would take care of the barns, mules and things and that is what he would do. He was the blacksmith for everybody.

BAUMGARTNER: Were there any other jobs that people held that they would do things for other family members?

ROGERS: No, that is what he did. It was like when things break down, sweeps needed sharpening you would take them to him he would sharpen them; that is what he did.

BAUMGARTNER: Was he your dad's brother?

ROGERS: No. His wife was my daddy's sister. That is who I am named after. His name was B. Robert and they called him Big Robert and me Little Robert. My sisters called him Uncle B. He was my auntie's husband.

BAUMGARTNER: So, there were like seven houses and everybody did their own thing, and farmed. They all had families. It was a pretty big community. Were there any other outside families that lived on the property?

ROGERS: There was another family named Mr. Dill, Ms. Viola and Mr. Shell. They were my auntie's husband, and his relatives.

BAUMGARTNER: Kind of like in-laws.

ROGERS: Yes, in the community.

BAUMGARTNER: Do you have any idea how big Mr. Harris's place was; how many acres could you guess?

ROGERS: It went all the way from what I called the Big Gate to the Brazos River. That is how much land he owned. A couple of thousand acres. On the farm where I was, he had three sections. The lot where we were, the lot where Mr. Fay McKinney was, and a lot where Mr. James was, Mr. Will James. He had three different places where he had lots where people lived and had mules to take care of.

BAUMGARTNER: Mr. Hunter Harris, the owner of the property; where did he live?

ROGERS: He lived in town.

BAUMGARTNER: Did he ever come out there?

ROGERS: Oh yeah, he came out there.

BAUMGARTNER: What was he like?

ROGERS: He was friendly, he was no mean man.

BAUMGARTNER: Pretty nice?

ROGERS: Yes, pretty nice.

BAUMGARTNER: That was a pretty common set-up in those days?

ROGERS: It was the way of life. That is the way everybody lived.

BAUMGARTNER: Everyone had to pick cotton and chop and pull corn. Everyone took care of their own garden. What were some other responsibilities that you had growing up?

ROGERS: My daddy always had cows and hogs all the time, chickens. Me and my other brothers we had to feed the cows, milk the cow, and feed the hogs.

BAUMGARTNER: How would you feed the cows?

ROGERS: We put hay for them and when spring came, we had to pull grass to give to them.

BAUMGARTNER: You had to pull the grass?

ROGERS: Um-hum. Like Johnson grass in the field. And we had to feed the horses.

BAUMGARTNER: You planted corn when it wasn't cotton season?

ROGERS: Yes.

BAUMGARTNER: So, you had to butcher the hogs?

ROGERS: My daddy did the butchering. We had a garden. We raised cabbage, cushaws, pumpkins, sweet potatoes, carrots, beets, collard greens.

BAUMGARTNER: On the farm all the families had their own gardens?

ROGERS: Um-hum. Each family had their own gardens. They were mostly used to raise greens and different stuff like that. For our own food. We always had a big cushaw patch. We raised pumpkins and cushaws.

BAUMGARTNER: I don't know what a cushaw is.

ROGERS: You never heard of a cushaw? You don't know what a cushaw is?

BAUMGARTNER: No.

ROGERS: Squash. We raised cushaws and pumpkins to give to the hogs and we would eat it too.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you put your stuff up to save for later during the year?

ROGERS: We had a little shed for the cushaws and pumpkins and me and my daddy and my brothers would put them in and save them for the hogs in the winter time.

BAUMGARTNER: What about figs?

ROGERS: Figs, yes.

BAUMGARTNER: Did they have to plant the figs or did figs just grow up around here?

ROGERS: You could take a fig bush and you would cut a sprout off and stick it in the ground and it would grow.

BAUMGARTNER: So, you didn't take food from the garden into Fulshear to sell. What about the eggs?

ROGERS: Yes, my daddy had a lot of chickens and me and my other brother we would gather the eggs and we would walk to Fulshear and sell them. We would swap off what we got for the eggs for food, or we would sell the eggs and with the money we got with the eggs we would buy different stuff for my momma.

BAUMGARTNER: You would walk to Fulshear to sell the eggs?

ROGERS: Walked. Anywhere we went, we walked.

BAUMGARTNER: How far away was that?

ROGERS: About five miles I believe going down toward Simonton. We lived at on the other side of the cemetery.

SISTER LORENA: I carried many baskets of eggs; that was part of our living. We would sell some, and sometimes I had the egg basket in one hand and the kerosene can in the other hand. When I got the money for the eggs, they would go fill the can for me to bring back.

BAUMGARTNER: What's the name of the cemetery you said was on the way to the farm?

ROGERS: Rice Cemetery.

BAUMGARTNER: You have family there?

ROGERS: My daddy is buried there, my uncle Kid is buried there, my granddad is buried there, and Uncle Henry. Both Franks are buried there, my granddad and his son Frank Rogers, Jr., that's Uncle Kid.

BAUMGARTNER: You got a pretty good part of your family buried there.

ROGERS: Yeah. There are other people there that I know too. In the old times that is the only cemetery that my family used but there is another cemetery near Brookshire where my grandmother is buried at. My grandmother, Harriet Clark Rogers, is buried there but that is the only one that got buried over there and they do not use it no more.

BAUMGARTNER: Someone told me that a lot of times they did not put out tombstones.

ROGERS: No, they didn't. Most of them are buried close together. Just side by side.

BAUMGARTNER: Is your mother there?

ROGERS: Right now, my mother and my aunties, my brother and my other brother are all buried in Paradise Cemetery in Houston.

BAUMGARTNER: That is where you want to be, your resting place, I guess?

ROGERS: No, the VA. That is where my wife Dorothy Mae is buried, off of Veterans Memorial in Houston.

BAUMGARTNER: That is good.

RECREATION

BAUMGARTNER: When you weren't doing chores, what did you do for fun when you were growing up? Was there any water out there, creeks or the river?

ROGERS: Oh yeah. We fished in the creek. For catfish and whatever would bite.

BAUMGARTNER: What did you use for bait? Grasshoppers?

ROGERS: Earthworms. No grasshoppers.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you do any hunting?

ROGERS: We hunted at night.

BAUMGARTNE: What did you hunt?

ROGERS: Anything that we could catch [all laughing]. Rabbits, squirrels, coons, possums, armadillos.

BAUMGARTNER: At that time, you hunted possums and people do not eat them much these days.

ROGERS: They eat coons now but not possums now.

SISTER CLARA MAE: It does not get cold enough to get the germs out of them. In a few weeks I will be 82, and back in the days if you can remember the old people would not go hunting until it was cold in the wintertime. I didn't understand but the winter season was better because the cold or freeze would kill some of the germs in the animals. We would fry the rabbits and you would think you were eating high on the hog; I ate a many of them.

ROGERS: Back then my daddy always was a pretty good provider. He would always have hogs, chickens, and we would hunt and kill rabbits and hang them on the north side of the house and it would get cold back then, the rabbit would dry and then our mother would tell us to go and get a rabbit and she cooked it.

We would rabbit hunt and we would squirrel hunt. Squirrel hunt was later in the evening.

BAUMGARTNER: What did you hunt with?

ROGERS: Dogs, and we had a single shot rifle and a shotgun.

BAUMGARTNER: Oh, you had a shotgun.

OZAY ROGERS: I still have the rifle.

BAUMGARTNER: A single shot; is it a 22?

OZAY ROGERS: It is a 22.

ROGERS: He got the rifle and I got the shotgun. Thirty-six-inch barrel, single shot.

BAUMGARTNER: Shotgun shells were costly then.

ROGERS: They came in a box and you could get them in a box.

BAUMGARTNER: On the farm, what could you play with as kids?

ROGERS: We didn't have any toys.

COUSIN ZERLEAN: Back in the days my mom would tell the story that Uncle B. Robert Woods, the one who ran the blacksmith shop, he played the accordion and some nights they would have something to eat and he would play the music and they all danced. They had suppers at the halls, one hall is still standing and we would all get in wagons and come to Fulshear. They called it Feast of Box Supper.

The ladies would fix the boxes to raise money for different farms. They would put out different boxes with pretty paper and somebody would get up and say how much they would pay for this and some guy, it was usually a man, would say I will give \$2.00 for that box and somebody would give \$.50 for that box. That is the way they raised money for different farms. Crepe paper--my grandmother would make crepe paper dresses for the girls to wear and we would march around in the hall. They would sing but we didn't have a piano so they got a broom handle and hit the floor making time. They kept time like that and keep singing, and everybody had different colored crepe dresses on. That was good times. After that we would have homemade ice cream.

FAMILY LIVING QUARTERS

BAUMGARTNER: Where did you live?

ROGERS: We called it a shotgun house is what we called it and that is where we lived. It was four rooms.

BAUMGARTNER: The kids today and the people that are growing up today, they do not understand how primitive things were out in the country in that era.

ROGERS: Back then there was no electricity, radio, no phone, and no indoor privileges, you know. The only light was lamp light. No indoor plumbing.

BAUMGARTNER: Lamp light, like a lantern.

ROGERS: It was just a regular lamp. Have you ever seen a kerosene lamp?

BAUMGARTNER: Yes, I have seen them when my brothers were camping outdoors.

ROGERS: I've still got some of them.

BAUMGARTNER: What would happen when a norther would blow in and it would be cold? No gas, how did you heat the house?

ROGERS: When a norther blew in, we got out and cut wood and put wood in a big heater we had. We could put wood in it and it would put out heat. We would go out in the woods and cut the trees out. There was a bunch of woods back then.

BAUMGARTNER: What would you cut wood with, an ax or with a saw?

ROGERS: We had an ax and a saw. We had a cross-cut saw. I still have the saw.

BAUMGARTNER: You've saved some great mementos from the old times. You guys must have worked hard.

ROGERS: Back then when the winter came my daddy and my brothers would pick out a place where we were going to cut wood and we would cut all day and cut the wood up and the next day we would haul it.

BAUMGARTNER: How did you haul it?

ROGERS: Hauled it with a wagon and mules.

BAUMGARTNER: Wagon and mules. Is that how you got around in those days?

ROGERS: That's how you got around in those days, with wagon and mules. Go to town in a wagon and go to town on horseback.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you have horses?

ROGERS: We had horses.

BAUMGARTNER: Oh, you did?

ROGERS: We had horses. Ever since I can remember we always had horses, cows, chickens and hogs.

BAUMGARTNER: Chickens and hogs were a main part of your food. What about cows, were they for milk?

ROGERS: Milk and cream. We never killed them. We didn't kill the cows; if you wanted a steak we went to the store.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you drink milk?

ROGERS: Yes. Back then there was no refrigerator to put milk in. My daddy had a shelf and we would put milk in and then they would churn and make the butter. We had our

own butter. When there was a cream that came to the top, they would spin it off and put the cream up there cover it up.

BAUMGARTNER: What did your mom have for your dinner and stuff?

ROGERS: Back then when we got ready to eat my mother would cook and when she said come eat you didn't ask what she had. Whatever she fixed. She didn't ask if you liked it.

BAUMGARTNER: What was the house like? You said it had four rooms.

ROGERS: It was a two-bedroom house and a kitchen and that is all we had. We all stayed there. Most of the time our parents, my momma and daddy lived in the room with my baby sister, Lula. We boys had a room together. After my dad passed one of them slept with my momma.

BAUMGARTNER: When you think of your momma what do you think of?

ROGERS: I think she was a great woman. I couldn't have had a better woman than her. My daddy and my momma, I never seen them fuss. They didn't fight, they always got along good and we always got along good.

BAUMGARTNER: Your dad he was a hard worker.

ROGERS: He was a hard worker.

BAUMGARTNER: He was young when he passed. How old was he?

ROGERS: 46. He had cancer.

SCHOOL

BAUMGARTNER: What did you do for school?

ROGERS: We went to Fulshear Colored School, just about two blocks from here. We had to

EDITOR'S NOTE: This discussion took place at Fulshear Community Center in the center of town.

go to school through seventh grade. School would start after the crop was brought in, class started in September and that is when all the crops had been gathered.

BAUMGARTNER: When you were going to school, that was before integration?

ROGERS: Yes, well before it. They had a school for the whites and a school for the blacks.

BAUMGARTNER: So, the schoolhouse was right here in town. Was it a one-room school or two rooms?

ROGERS: It was two different rooms. One of them was for younger children and the other for older. The school went to the seventh grade. There were so many grades in one room and so many grades in the other room for the older kids. We went to school from 8:00 o'clock to 4:00 o'clock and you had an hour off for lunch.

BAUMGARTNER: Before you went to school did y'all have breakfast or anything?

ROGERS: Um-hum. We would have syrup and bread and a slice of bacon. We always had bacon.

BAUMGARTNER: How did you get to school?

ROGERS: Walk [laughter]. We walked to school. Right now, it does not get as cold now as it used to then.

BAUMGARTNER: You mean when a norther came through.

ROGERS: Back then the wintertime was colder than it is now.

BAUMGARTNER: What if it was raining?

ROGERS: We walked and wore a raincoat and boots.

BAUMGARTNER: If it was raining to start with, would you get a break or you had to walk anyway?

ROGERS: If it was raining you put on a raincoat and you went to school.

BAUMGARTNER: How many students were in the school?

ROGERS: I don't know. All the children in the community went there but I don't know.

LORENA and CLARA MAE: About twenty-five.

ROGERS: We had what was called a school bucket that we took our lunch to school in. At that church over there, a lot of time when we had a recess, I would eat on the church steps.

BAUMGARTNER: Now where was that?

ROGERS: That Baptist church right there next to the school. Greater Zachery Missionary Baptist Church, still there but a new building.

BAUMGARTNER: At school did you have to do studies or homework?

ROGERS: You had homework to do for school, yes. At-home chores. We had to go to school, rain or shine, we went to school.

BAUMGARTNER: So, you went to school starting in the fall and you would go till summertime. Did you have the same teacher every year?

ROGERS: When I first started school, they had one teacher for one year and she taught that one year. They got rid of her because she was so mean and we got Ms. Ruby Flemings my second year of school. They brought her in and the other teacher Ms. Willie retired so I didn't have but one teacher. She was my first teacher and when the other teacher retired, I went to the next room and she went too.

BAUMGARTNER: That was like in the second grade. What about the third and fourth?

ROGERS: The same teacher. Ms. Ruby all the way through the seventh grade.

BAUMGARTNER: She was a good teacher?

ROGERS: Yeah, yeah. She was a good teacher. I liked her.

BAUMGARTNER: She must have had a good influence on you. Did they divide the school into different rooms?

ROGERS: First, second, third, and fourth was in one room; fifth, sixth and seventh was in another room.

BAUMGARTNER: And Ms. Ruby moved along with you. What did you study?

ROGERS: Reading, writing, arithmetic, health, and English. We had five different subjects.

BAUMGARTNER: The last one was what?

ROGERS: English. We had reading books, writing books, English, geography, and history. I was pretty good in school and I liked math.

BAUMGARTNER: Did that help you at all with your job in later years?

ROGERS: Yeah. When I finished school back then, it was a long time ago, they only had two

schools that went past the seventh grade. Mainly after that they went to Pleasant Hills and some went to Brookshire Schools. My cousin and another lady they went on to high school but I didn't.

FULSHEAR IN THE OLD DAYS

BAUMGARTNER: What was the town of Fulshear like back when you were growing up?

ROGERS: It is hard to explain to you like it was, it's changed so much. There was just one street and two stores.

BAUMGARTNER: What was the street like then?

ROGERS: It was mostly gravel or dirt.

BAUMGARTNER: That was way before they had asphalt streets around here. There were two stores?

ROGERS: Yes. Mr. Hunter Harris had one store and there was another store named Berkman Store and a café. Later Mr. Dozier had a store.

Burkeman was a regular clothing store. Back then they had most of everything that a farmer needed, supplies, and some clothes.

The Harris Store was right around the corner. That was a grocery store. My mom and dad would come and buy stuff there. All the basic stuff you would need. When the crop is growing different people would go to the store and you could get groceries and different stuff and put it on the book until the end of the year. Most of the time my daddy provided enough that at the end of the crop he would not owe nothing. We would farm and after the end of the year my dad would settle up.

BAUMGARTNER: They say sharecropping was tough because the crop is dependent on the weather; what happened if you had a bad year? If the crop did not make you might have hardly any money coming in.

ROGERS: You just rode it out. All we did was just work and my daddy took care of everything. I don't know how it was managed but my daddy could manage it and he did. We were never dishonest and we were never homeless. We had hogs and chickens. That would keep us going to eat.

BAUMGARTNER: Usually he would get some money at the end. It was hard to get ahead that way.

ROGERS: It was hard to get ahead.

BAUMGARTNER: Dozier's Bar B Que is still here, right? After all these years.

ROGERS: Right. That is the younger Dozier's, I know the parents have passed.

BAUMGARTNER: Did he have the store then, the old Dozier?

ROGERS: No, that was the son. The Dozier's mom and dad were Ed and Mary Dozier. There was three boys and one baby daughter named Mary Ann.

COUSIN Zerlean: His young daughter, we were born at the same time. The old Dozier house is still standing. His wife's name is Marion Dozier and she worked in the store.

ROGERS: Mr. Dozier was the straw boss. He worked for Mr. Harris.

BAUMGARTNER: Did they have overseers then that came out to see how the crop was doing?

ROGERS: Ed Dozier, was the old man, the straw boss.

BAUMGARTNER: Was he a good guy?

ROGERS: He was a good guy, he was alright.

BAUMGARTNER: We used to have Dozier's process our deer for us after hunting.

Who were some of the big farmers around here? You said Hunter Harris was one of them.

ROGERS: Harris was one and Hudgins was one; they were about the only two here in Fulshear.

BAUMGARTNER: Any others?

ROGERS: They were only two I knew of here. There were mostly sharecroppers here in Fulshear. Other than that, there were some other farmers around but most of the black people down there owned their own land. That was down around Simonton and Valley Lodge.

BAUMGARTNER: How many people lived in Fulshear when you were here?

ROGERS: I don't know. It was quite a few in the area.

BAUMGARTNER: It was partially blacks and partially whites that lived in Fulshear?

ROGERS: Yes, and some Spanish. Back then there were not a whole lot of Spanish but later on the Spanish started coming in to pick cotton. Some lived here twelve months a year and some didn't. Some of them lived on the farms.

BAUMGARTNER: What would you do if you got sick and you needed a doctor? If you got sick or broke an arm or something?

ROGERS: They had one doctor here, Dr. Barker. He was Mr. Hunter Harris' brother. And there was a hospital in Rosenberg.

BAUMGARTNER: How would you get to Rosenberg?

ROGERS: In later years people started getting cars. Somebody would have a car and you borrowed a ride.

BAUMGARTNER: Back in the twenties, they had some cars around but most people didn't have cars.

ROGERS: Most people back then, it was horse and buggy and wagon.

BAUMGARTNER: Wasn't there a little train that went through town?

ROGERS: Yes. Went from Fulshear to Houston and on to Wallis. It was called the Dinky Train. It was for passengers only. Then they had a freight train that come through here too.

BAUMGARTNER: How often did the Dinky come through?

ROGERS: Once in the morning and once in the evening. It came through every day; it was the only transportation here. It would take us to Houston. When you went on the Dinky the family didn't come along, just the one that had to go and the others stayed at the house.

BAUMGARTNER: How often did you go into Houston?

ROGERS: Not very often. We would go into Houston to go shopping occasionally. We would go into Rosenberg more often than we did to Houston. But not often. I don't know it might have been once a month or less.

CHURCH

BAUMGARTNER: You went to school here in town. Where'd you go to church?

ROGERS: The name of our church was Lively Oak Baptist Church. It is between here and Simonton.

BAUMGARTNER: How often did you go to church?

ROGERS: Once a month. Our church day was on the first Sunday of the month.

BAUMGARTNER: First Sunday. Another church might be on the second Sunday.

ROGERS: That's right. Now they have church every Sunday. The Pastor was Sam Banks. The whole family went together.

BAUMGARTNER: Was it fun?

ROGERS: I guess it was [all laughing]. When we went to church our parents didn't ask you if you wanted to go. They told you, you were going. Now they ask the children if they want to go to church but back then they didn't ask you.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you say you had to walk to church?

ROGERS: Yes. Our whole family, we would live together and all of our family we would get together and we would walk to church. It was me and L.C. and the whole bunch of us we would walk together and the women would walk in their walking shoes and before they got to church they had a place where they would put their walking shoes and they would hide them until we come back home [laughter].

BAUMGARTNER: That is a pretty good walk. What if the first Sunday it was raining?

ROGERS: [All laughing].

BAUMGARTNER: I guess you pretty much went every first Sunday rain or shine. What was church like?

ROGERS: The preacher would preach.

BAUMGARTNER: Y'all would have lunch after church?

ROGERS: Not unless it was a special occasion.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you have like weddings there?

ROGERS: When I got married, we got married at Brookshire; it was just at the house.

BAUMGARTNER: Would you say that church was a big deal?

ROGERS: No, it wasn't a big deal but when my mother and daddy went, we went too.

BAUMGARTNER: Was religion an important part of people's life back then?

ROGERS: Back then it was, yeah.

WORLD WAR II

BAUMGARTNER: So, in those days education lasted through the seventh grade. Then what did you do?

ROGERS: I was farming on the Harris property; which I did from the time I was seven years old until I was twenty. Then in 1942 I got drafted and went into the service.

BAUMGARTNER: You were drafted? How did that work? Did you have to show up in Fulshear or did you have to go into Houston?

ROGERS: I went to Houston.

BAUMGARTNER: You went in there and you had to just bring a suitcase with your stuff?

ROGERS: I didn't have nothing but a bag.

BAUMGARTNER: Was it scary?

ROGERS: No, it wasn't. Back then I was twenty years old and to me there wasn't nothing scary.

BAUMGARTNER: Did any of your friends or your brothers go the same time you did?

ROGERS: I had friends that went about the same time but nobody from my family but me.

BAUMGARTNER: How did you get there?

ROGERS: I went by train on the Dinky to Houston, and after Houston they sent me to San Antonio by bus. I stayed in San Antonio for a time for some basics; then they gave you a duffle bag with all your clothes, you're eating stuff and I was shipped off to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

BAUMGARTNER: You didn't know anybody and you didn't have any family. What was Fort Leonard Wood like?

ROGERS: It was something completely different from what I had done before. It was like a training school. I had to train, go through obstacle courses, rifle range and all of that. Just regular Army service. You had a regular routine.

BAUMGARTNER: In the service it was still segregated?

ROGERS: Yeah. We never came in contact with the white soldiers. We went to town but we were in different outfits. In Missouri we had a PX but the PX was one side for white and one side for colored.

BAUMGARTNER: What about overseas?

ROGERS: As far as you know we were treated fair but we were separated into different units. You couldn't do any good to change things, you had to accept it.

BAUMGARTNER: The PX, was it like a commissary?

ROGERS: Commissary, we called it the PX. Where you could buy cigarettes, candy and stuff like that.

BAUMGARTNER: Did they pay you when you were in the Army?

ROGERS: You had service pay, fifty dollars a month. I had an allotment going to my daddy so I didn't get the full amount.

BAUMGARTNER: Fifty dollars a month. Fifty dollars back then was worth a lot more than it is today. You said you had an allotment for your dad?

ROGERS: I would get twenty-five dollars and I would have the other twenty-five dollars sent home to my daddy.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you write letters at all?

ROGERS: I had a big family and I got quite a bit of letters when mail call came.

BAUMGARTNER: From your sisters and your brothers.

ROGERS: From my brothers.

BAUMGARTNER: Not Ozay, he was too young [laughter]. Did you write letters back?

ROGERS: Yes, I wrote letters all the time.

BAUMGARTNER: Did any of your family save any of the letters or do you have any of them at all?

ROGERS: They had quite a few of them when I got back home. I guess they lost them over the years. It would have been good if I would have kept some of them.

BAUMGARTNER: They would be interesting today.

ROGERS: Back then they would give you a paper that would fold up and you could write on it. It was just GI paper you could write on. You just folded it up and you just mailed it. You didn't need no stamp on it.

BAUMGARTNER: That was way before telephones. Was your family worried about you?

ROGERS: Well yeah, yeah. I was the oldest one and I was the only one away from home.

BAUMGARTNER: What did people do with their pay? Did they spend it at the PX or they sent it home?

ROGERS: What I did with mine, I kept mine and sent part of it home. I do not know what the others did with theirs. A lot of the guys in the outfit they smoked and I never smoked.

BAUMGARTNER: That is probably why you are 98 years old.

ROGERS: It is like this -- my daddy he smoked, he chewed, and he dipped and there are eight of us and none of us did any of that.

BAUMGARTNER: Why?

ROGERS: He did, but he didn't allow us to do it.

BAUMGARTNER: He didn't allow you to do it.

ROGERS: No and we didn't.

BAUMGARTNER: So, after Leonard Wood, then what?

ROGERS: We stayed there about six or eight weeks and I went overseas in 1944. I went to England. We went over on the Queen Elizabeth, a big ship. I think it took seven to eight days on the water before we got to England.

BAUMGARTNER: Did people get seasick?

ROGERS: No, they didn't get seasick. Too big of a boat.

BAUMGARTNER: You got to England and were stationed there?

ROGERS: We landed in Glasgow, Scotland. From there we got to England where we caught a truck and they took us to a place called Lockley's Corner and we stayed there until we went to France. We were in training.

BAUMGARTNER: What was your unit called?

ROGERS: 354 Engineers was the name of the outfit. We took training to assist in building bridges and railroads. Before D-day we were in England and the war was going on. I was there when D-day took place. You could see planes going and some coming.

Thirty days after D-Day we went on over. We were shipped to France. We crossed the English Channel in a boat they called an LST and when the LST got near the beach the boat dropped the lift down and the soldiers went into the water to get to the shore, and that is what we had to do to make it to the beach.

When we were over there, they had captured the German soldiers and they would line them up. There were thousands and thousands of them. They captured them, they would line them up and they had different prisoner camps to send them.

BAUMGARTNER: Were you ever in combat?

ROGERS: No, I was always behind the line.

BAUMGARTNER: When you were in France, what did your unit do?

ROGERS: We helped build a switch yard and a train yard, for trains to bring ammunition and supplies from the United States to France. That took a couple months. I had gone to school for motor transport and they assigned me to the motor pool and I was assigned to drive a truck. I was attached to another driver; me and another guy would drive the truck. We hauled supplies and material to different places. Later on, I started driving mail trucks. I drove the mail truck till I got out.



US Army trucks leaving an LST at Normandy landing beach.

BAUMGARTNER: How long did you do that?

ROGERS: About six or eight months, we were stationed there a while before we were sent home.

BAUMGARTNER: The French people that lived over there, they were friendly to the Americans?

ROGERS: Yeah, they were friendly. I did not have no trouble. You could pass on into Germany, and

I went into Germany. When the war ended in 1945 then I came back to the States.

BAUMGARTNER: Everybody was glad that it was over?

ROGERS: Yes, they were glad it was over [laughter].

BAUMGARTNER: So, you never saw any friends from back home?

ROGERS: No. Other soldiers were from different parts of the country. It was pretty interesting. I had plenty friends in the service, from all over the country. When the war was over, they went their way and I went mine. I had one friend that lived in St. Louis and after I got married, I went to visit him with my wife and kids.

BAUMGARTNER: Like a reunion.

ROGERS: Yeah.

BAUMGARTNER: Cool. The war was over and you came back by boat to where, New Orleans?

ROGERS: Came into New York Harbor. We came back on Brandon Victory that was the ship we came back on.

BAUMGARTNER: That must have been like a big deal. You are a young man and you leave Fulshear, Texas and go see the world. You returned into New York.

ROGERS: Came to Camp Shanks and we stayed there. When I was in New York I was still

<p>EDITOR'S NOTE: Camp Shanks was a holding center near New York City for returning troops before they were shipped to their home destinations.</p>

in the service, on leave. I had a friend, James Slate, he was from Virginia. I went to New York with him to visit his sister. They gave you so many days there, then we left and came back to San Antonio.

BAUMGARTNER: There in New York City. That must have been pretty interesting.

ROGERS: Very interesting, somebody from Texas in New York City.

BAUMGARTNER: Would you say that the war was a big deal in your life? Did you think about it much over the years?

ROGERS: Yes, the war was a big deal in my life. I thought about home, but I think the best way is when you leave don't ever look back. If you look back you will always be remembering. Like Fulshear. Before I went overseas, I got to come back home one time on vacation and then I had to return and catch a train in Fulshear and go to Houston and go back to San Antonio.

BAUMGARTNER: I would think some people would get home and they wouldn't want to return to the Army.

ROGERS: You have to go back. You would be AWOL (Absent Without Leave).

RETURNING HOME

BAUMGARTNER: Everybody was coming home. The war was over. Your other brothers did not get drafted. What did you do when you came home?

ROGERS: It was 1945. We all lived together for a while after I got back home. I stayed with them in the country at first.

BAUMGARTNER: A lot of the people around here worked on farms.

ROGERS: After the war everybody started moving away. A lot of them moved to Houston. They moved to different places. All of my family went to Houston. Other families came here to Fulshear. After the war my uncles and aunties all left the farm. Some people, like Zerlean's father, they moved to Fulshear. My uncle, my auntie, and two uncles they bought a place right over here and moved to Fulshear. I do not know where other people from the farm went.

BAUMGARTNER: Why did everybody move?

ROGERS: Because the farm collapsed and there was no place to farm no more.

BAUMGARTNER: You could not make enough money to get by on?

ROGERS: There was no demand for no farm. In this part of the country cotton just played out. Here in Texas it just went kaput. I left the farm and went to Houston.

BAUMGARTNER: When did you get your first car, when you got out of the service?

ROGERS: Yeah, 1945 when I got back from the War, we got a 1935 Ford. We all put together our money, my other brothers all three of us, and bought the car. That is how we got around, in that car.

BAUMGARTNER: So, the family left together.

ROGERS: Yes.

BAUMGARTNER: Where did everybody move to?

ROGERS: All of us moved to Houston. It was after our father passed.

LORINA AND CLARA MAE: He was in the service when our father passed in 1944.

BAUMGARTNER: How did he pass away when he was so young?

ROGERS: Cancer.

BAUMGARTNER: So, did you all live together in Houston?

ROGERS: Yeah, we all lived together. My mother bought a lot, 60 x 100-foot lot there, in Acres Homes, when I was in the service. After I got home, I built the house with another carpenter in Acres Homes and then we all moved there in 1947.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Acres Homes was a rural community north of Houston established during World War I when Houston landowners began selling home sites in the area that were large enough to contain small gardens and raise chickens or farm animals. These large areas were often divided by the acre and not by the plot, hence the name "Acres Homes". The community was also marketed as a place where African Americans could own houses and land instead of being in more dense urban areas. At one time it was the largest unincorporated African American community in the southern United States.
- [*Wikipedia*]

ROGERS: To begin with the family stayed in that house. Then we built another house in the

same area, down the street from where that house is. Then another house. My brother's house, and my other brother's house. All three are beside each other. I got my own house, down the street.

My brothers they were younger but they both have passed away. I am the oldest but my other brother passed away and the other brother passed away. We all live side by side.

BAUMGARTNER: The other two houses, are they still in the family or did they sell them over the years?

ROGERS: They still got them.

BAUMGARTNER: Do you still have the first house?

ROGERS: We still have it, yes. We still have it but we have it rented out.

BAUMGARTNER: That is pretty neat to be able to keep them for seventy years. That is a long time. The whole family moved together to Acres Home, and then what did you do?

ROGERS: My other brother got married and then my other brother got married and then I got married.

BAUMGARTNER: When they got married, they stayed in Houston? Did anybody move back to Fulshear?

ROGERS: We all lived on the same street. Nobody moved back.

BAUMGARTNER: What did you all do in Houston? People had to get employment; they had to get jobs and make some money.

ROGERS: After I got out of the service, I got a job with my three brothers; we worked at a feed store. A pretty big store, Archer Grain Company. I did that until '51.

BAUMGARTNER: What was the pay like in those days?

ROGERS: I was only making fifteen or sixteen cents an hour. Me and my brothers, three of us were working and we were making \$21.00 a week between us and I would keep \$7 and we gave a portion to my mother to take care of my sisters. Between the three of us, we would take home \$21.00.

BAUMGARTNER: Wow. When did you get married?

ROGERS: April 25th, 1948. She was Dorothy Mae Gates then. Dorothy Mae Rogers.

BAUMGARTNER: She went by Dorothy Mae or Dorothy?

ROGERS: Dorothy Mae. I was 27. She passed away four years ago. We were married sixty-seven years.

BAUMGARTNER: That's wonderful. A lot of people then got married younger than that but you were in the War. How did you meet her?

ROGERS: When I got out of the service my brother next to me, he was going with a girl from Brookshire and my other brother was going with a girl from Brookshire and I met her through their friends.

BAUMGARTNER: She was from Brookshire too. So, you married a country girl.

ROGERS: Yeah. She worked as a beautician. She stayed at the house and did hair there and I worked at Sinclair Oil. Worked at the house and she continued to do that over the years until she retired.

BAUMGARTNER: When did you start having children?

ROGERS: Sterling, my first child was born December 2nd, 1948. I have five children.

BAUMGARTNER: That is great! Are they in Houston?

ROGERS: All of them are in Houston except one. My oldest one is in Indiana. Sterling Rogers, Raymond Rogers, Aldine Frances, Robert Carlton Rogers, and then Iris.



After about five years at the feed store, I got on at the oil refinery. My son Raymond was born in 1952 and that year I went to work at Sinclair Oil Company. They've grown to two or three companies now.

BAUMGARTNER: What did you do there?

ROGERS: Worked in the labor gang for about eight years. Then they started what they called the eleven-shift operation and I had to go to school to pass the test to get into operations. I passed the test and I stayed in operations until around 1970 and they made me a shift foreman, and I remained as unit shift foreman from that year until I retired. I retired June 23, 1985. I worked there thirty-three and half years

BAUMGARTNER: That's impressive, thirty-three years. That was a good job.

ROGERS: A pretty good job, yeah.

ANOTHER ERA

BAUMGARTNER: Your children grew up a lot different than you guys here.

ROGERS: Yes. A whole lot different than me. They did not have to go through what I had to go through. But Houston is where I am living now, my home is here, I raised the children up in Houston and they all went to school here in Houston.

BAUMGARTNER: Do you think it was harder to raise children in the big city or out in the country?

ROGERS: It was no problem for me here because we were all family here together. The children did not have to play with nobody but their own relatives. We did not have any bad influence. It was my brother's house, my other brother's house and down the street was my auntie's house and behind me my sister's house. One sister on the back street and other sister on this street. Where Ozay lives there are two sisters that live side by side and right next to him is his niece's house. We all live close together.

BAUMGARTNER: You had your family and they stayed together. When you moved to Houston with your family what did you do for church?

ROGERS: After we came to Houston, we joined a church down there and we still belong to that same church, Greater Zion. All of my whole family, the children grew up in that church and we are still all there.

BAUMGARTNER: Greater Zion Church. Is it in the same building?

ROGERS: When we were first over there, they had a small building and in 1965 they built this building they have now, 50 years ago. I am a trustee, my brother is a trustee, and he is a deacon but I did not want to be a deacon. He takes care of the church and different stuff.

OZAY ROGERS: Excuse me I would like to say something. My brother is a role model to me. When I was younger, the brothers worked and during that time my mother was not getting any social security. My dad was a farmer, he passed, my three brothers that were married had their families to take care of and also took care of us. They took care of their children, their wives, and they took care of all of us. I watched him. I had three brothers, I never saw them argue or fight. No arguments. They were together. I did not want to cut in but I just had to get it out. I will remain quiet while you go and talk to him [laughter].

BAUMGARTNER: Mr. Rogers, why do you think you have been fortunate enough to live to the age of 98?

ROGERS: I do not know [laughing].

BAUMGARTNER: If we were asked to compare, what is better, the way it used to be or the way it is today?

ROGERS: That is out of the question. It is better today.

OZAY ROGERS: One thing about it he never whopped me. He probably wanted to but he didn't [laughing].

BAUMGARTNER: That's good. There are a lot of families where the brothers and sisters don't get along so well. Y'all have been blessed.

You've taught your children the right attitude. What would it be like to compare today to the old days? What is good about the old days and what is good about now, on how things have changed?

ROGERS: Things you did back then you could not do now. It is altogether different. People don't trust each other like they used to. The people nowadays will lie to you more now than they would back then. People are not as truthful and honest now as they were back then. Nowadays people can do a wrong and other people uphold them; and they are wrong.

You take raising kids now. You can't raise kids nowadays like you did back then. Back then you could raise a child but now you can't raise them. The school raises the child now.

BAUMGARTNER: It is hard, you can try your hardest with your kids and sometimes it is still not easy to do. One of my sons I had hell with him and he had some friends that were not the right kind of friends and you just get stuck with it and you work it out and hopefully it comes out ok.

ROGERS: The world is a different world today. Back then we were poor and didn't have nothing but we were happy. But now you ain't got nothing and you are unhappy.

BAUMGARTNER: Was it harder for you growing up than your children?

ROGERS: No, it wasn't. I didn't worry about nothing and there was nothing I could do about it so I just took it as it was.

BAUMGARTNER: Go with the flow [laughter]. But for your children it was in some

respects an easier life than you grew up with.

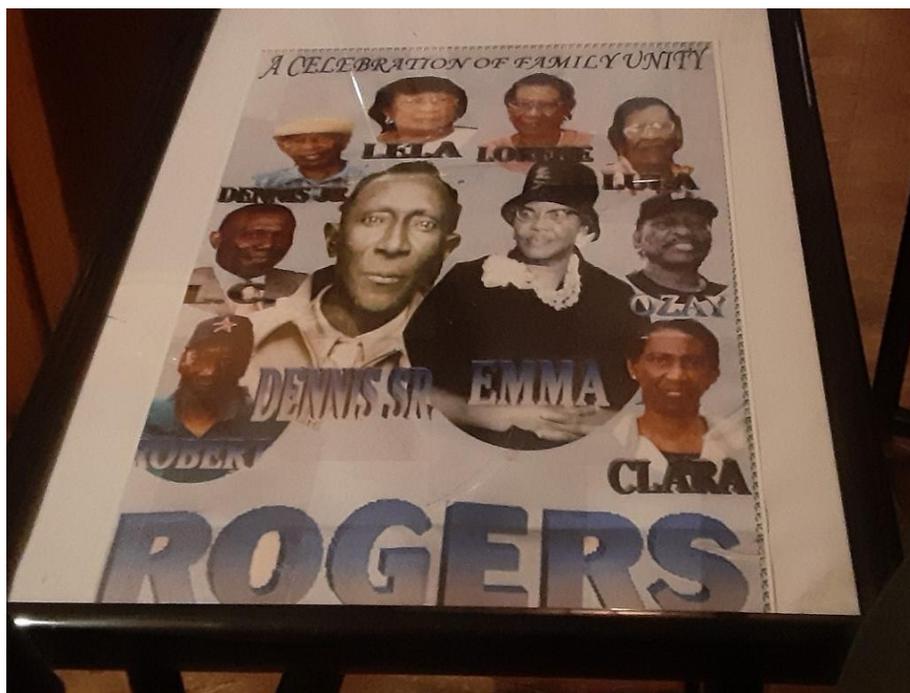
ROGERS: I have had some pretty good children; they raised up pretty good. I got five, all here in Houston.

BAUMGARTNER: I am sure you have had a hard life in some ways but in some ways, you have had a blessed life.

ROGERS: Yeah, most of the time I tried to take care of my family. As long as you try to do right and stay on the right side of the law you are going to come out pretty good.

BAUMGARTNER: Yes. Your family has come out good. Do you have some family pictures we could use?

ROGERS: We got a picture with all of us on it with my momma. Years ago, when we first got married, my mother, with the first grandchildren she got, we all gathered at her house and we had a Christmas Party. She didn't have anything there but she baked chicken and we still have the picture.



The Rogers family: Robert's parents in the center with their children around them. (Robert is at the lower left.)

BAUMGARTNER: Oh, that would be good.

ROGERS: Then once a year we still have our family reunion. All the family gets together.

BAUMGARTNER: That's great. You must have a good-sized family reunion. I appreciate it and it was nice to meet all of you. Mr. Rogers, it has been a pleasure to meet you and talk to you. Ozay, it was nice to meet you. Thank you.

End of Interview