

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewees: **Robert Schumann**

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Interviewer: Diane L. Ware

Transcriber: Marsha Smith

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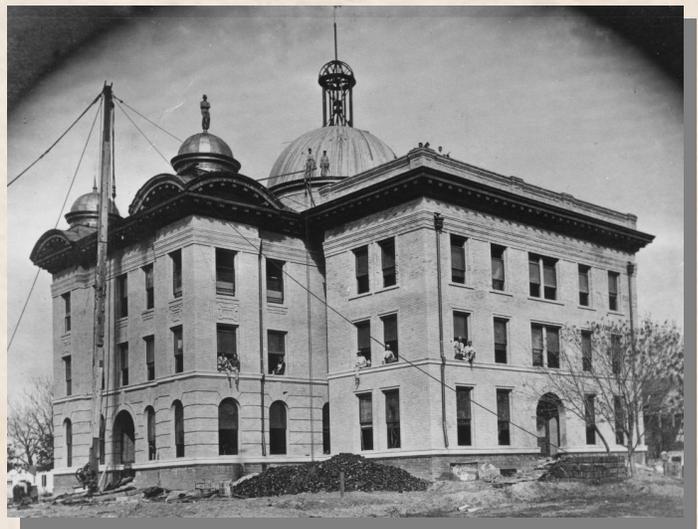
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Transcript

WARE: OK, you wanted to tell me some things about Sugar Land, why it was unique.

SCHUMANN: Well, I don't know where to start.

WARE: Okay, let's start with some basic biographical information. When and where were you born?

SCHUMANN: I was born here in Sugar Land in the house on 408 4th Street on July 29th, 1924.

WARE: Okay. You were born in the hospital or at the house?

SCHUMANN: No, at home.

WARE: And, and, who delivered you?

SCHUMANN: Miss Bachart and Miss Schmanuer, both ladies were from Richmond, from Rosenberg.

WARE: Do you know how to spell their names? Could you spell their names for me?
(chuckle)

SCHUMANN: (short laugh) Schmanuer and Bachart. [BAH-hurt.]

Both were family friends and German origin, people who mostly spoke German.

WARE: Really?! Okay, so they delivered you. You have brothers, correct?

SCHUMANN: Yes, I was the third of five children. There were two born after me and the last one passed away as a two month old child. It was just all boys in that family.

WARE: Okay. (chuckle) Your poor mother. (laughter)

SCHUMANN: (intake of breath as of laughter)

WARE: Were all five of you delivered by family friends?

SCHUMANN: They were born here at the house, but by whom, probably those ladies because they were family friends and experienced-- what do you call those --

WARE: Like a midwife?

SCHUMANN: Midwife.

WARE: Your parents obviously lived in Sugar Land. When did your parents come to Sugar Land?

SCHUMANN: Well, my father came about 1915. I just don't remember the dates that they were married. But what was unique about it is that the father to his bride didn't approve of Daddy or the marriage, because he didn't have a church here. So several of them, Mr. Baem and Daddy, were very instrumental in getting the [Catholic] church brought to Sugar Land. I was baptized in Missouri City. They had a church in the proximity of The Holy Family [Catholic Church] now. I was told this, because I would never have remembered it

WARE: Right (chuckle)

SCHUMANN: A priest would come in from I don't know where. Later on, Father Finnegan was one of the priests that I knew real well. They held Mass in the school auditorium and the alter was the piano.

WARE: (chuckle)

SCHUMANN: Father Finnegan was the one that I knew best; the first one, and he shared Sugar Land with Alvin and Huntsville. And, he was, I guess, the prison chaplain. He would tell us about the last days of some of the fellows that went to the electric chair.

WARE: Really!

SCHUMANN: And he gave them the last rites.

WARE: Right (softly)

SCHUMANN: He was a very active priest. Some of those priests would come to Sugar Land, would come by train and go to Clodine, and someone would pick 'em up and bring 'em here. I don't know that for sure, but that was told to me. That was before the church was built. You know they--the sugar company -- owned all the town but they gave the most prominent churches a corner lot between what is now Fourth Fifth Street and Fifth Street. You had the Methodist, the Presbyterian, the Baptist, and then the Catholics were the last ones to build.

WARE: Your dad was instrumental in getting the church built?

SCHUMANN: Yes ma'am, I'm sure of that because (chuckle) well, they didn't have one before that. You see, I was born in '24 and the church was built here--in '25 I think. I do remember barely the dedication. I don't know what year it was dedicated, because it's just too close, but-- any rate, you know, they used to have animal crackers. And they gave me some animal crackers to keep me quiet (chuckle).UMAH

WARE: (chuckle, laugh)

SCHUMANN: It's strange that I remember (chuckling while speaking) some little things like that!

WARE: Well, I've used that myself for my children, so I understand. (laughing) What did your father do here in Sugar Land?

SCHUMANN: He worked in the grocery department at the company store. He followed my uncle. My uncle came in first, and like many people that worked for the Industries they were from Schulenberg, Hallettsville, Weimer [Texas]. The Bankers or the Herders, the Hellencamps [family names]...

I was saying that some of those fellows would come in and were good, hard working, dependable people that said "Don't you have someone else over there?" They just came in and came in and came in, but the sugar company had them from Louisiana and, and Cuba. And so that was what made up the hub of Sugar Land. The Sugarland Industries and the Imperial Sugar Company were two different things, but, intermingled.

WARE: Right. Where did your family come in from?

SCHUMANN: Schulenberg.

WARE: Schulenberg. Okay. You were some of the Schulenberg branch. (chuckle)

SCHUMANN: Yes.

WARE: Was that your Uncle Paul that came here first?

SCHUMANN: Yes.

WARE: Did any more of your uncles come to Sugar Land after that?

SCHUMANN: Well, yes, but they was on my mother's side, there. Louie Mayer, Victor Blaschke, well, I had a friend near, he came here for a short while. And John Mayer, were on my mother's side of the family that drifted in here. (starting to chuckle)

WARE: You lived over on Fourth Street, you said. How long did you live in that house on Fourth Street?

SCHUMANN: Until, well, I went to the service. And then whenever I finished school, and I got married. Oh, let's put it this way, we moved out to the country, and THEN I got married. I was instrumental getting my parents to move out to the farm because that's where I was working and, and they had a big house over there and the company town was no real incentive at that time, it was just right after that, that they started selling the houses.

WARE: (chuckle)

SCHUMANN: And it made a difference, but we had already made that move and, I regret it now that we did not keep that house. I later bought a house here, well, I bought several houses in Sugar Land, and my brother and I bought one and moved my parents back into Sugar Land.

WARE: Really! When was that, that you bought a house and moved them back in, do you remember what year that was?

SCHUMANN: About 1959, something like that.

WARE: Okay. And which brother bought that house with you?

SCHUMANN: Max

WARE: Was that your youngest brother?

SCHUMANN: He was the closest brother.

WARE: Okay, closest brother. Okay.

SCHUMANN: (laugh)

WARE: Very good. Very good.

SCHUMANN: My older brother was nine years older than I was.

WARE: Oh my goodness. Okay. What were your brother's names, in order of their birth?

SCHUMANN: Herbert was the older one, then was Max, then was Robert, and then Lawrence is the one that passed away, and then William was, as my uncle Rick called him, the caboose (chuckle).

WARE: (laughs) I like that. (laughs) So you're right in the middle?

SCHUMANN: Yes, yes,

WARE: Okay. Some folks have told me that your mother grew flowers. Did your mother grow flowers?

SCHUMANN: My daddy was the real gardener--

WARE: Okay

SCHUMANN: See, my mother passed away when I was, I guess about two years old.

WARE: Ah.

SCHUMANN: And Daddy was destitute (laughing) you might say--

WARE: (laughing) Right.

SCHUMANN: And he married a girl that was one of the orphan trains. Children that came in from New York.

WARE: REALLY?!

SCHUMANN: After my mother passed away, his father-in-law introduced him to Hettie Freech, and they were married in November after my mother passed away in August.

WARE: Well, okay.

SCHUMANN: (chuckling) So that was a quick marriage.

WARE: Well, well it says a lot for Hettie that she would take on four children (laughing)

SCHUMANN: (laughs)

WARE: Now, so you were two years old. She took on four little boys (laughs)

SCHUMANN: Well, not exactly--

WARE: Okay

SCHUMANN: Max and the one older and William stayed with their aunt, Rosie Mayer. She married a Hinery. They were from Schulenberg. Herbert and I were here in Sugar Land and Daddy had a black woman, I remember her name was Gertrude, I can't think of her last name now, but anyway, she looked after us.

WARE: Okay.

SCHUMANN: And when Daddy got married and brought her home, he had been living out of Schulenberg but way out in the country. He didn't have any experience with a gas stove, and so Daddy was showing her how to use the gas stove, and he and I got up that morning and, and went in there and Daddy said--I'm going to back off just a minute...

WARE: Uh huh

SCHUMANN: I told Daddy some time before that, that he needed to go get us another mother (chuckling).

WARE: (laughs)

SCHUMANN: (still laughing) He said, "Tell your mother hello." [and young Schumann said:] "That's not my mother". But she WAS. (laughing)

WARE: (laughs) Right.

SCHUMANN: And she made a good one. So Hettie raised you as if you were her own child?

SCHUMANN: Oh yeah.

WARE: Did she learn how to use that gas stove?

SCHUMANN: Oh yeah (chuckling).

WARE: (laughing) Now, did William and Max eventually come back?

SCHUMANN: Oh yes.

WARE: How long were they gone?

SCHUMANN: Well I don't know but it was, it wasn't long. The prison Captain Flannigan--he wanted to adopt William, and Daddy said no, he wasn't going to break up the family (chuckles). And then, after I guess it wasn't no time at all, see, between my mother's death and Daddy's remarriage, well he combined the family right away.

WARE: Right. Good.

SCHUMANN: And--when we were growing up, she had one definite law, "You're in the house and come nighttime, quit that fooling around." (chuckles)

WARE: (laughs) So she WAS your mother, wasn't she.

SCHUMANN: Oh yes.

WARE: What was your mother's name? Your real mother's name. What was her first name?

SCHUMANN: Annie.

WARE: Annie. Okay.

SCHUMANN: She was a twin. Alma and Annie were twins. Alma married Victor Blaschke, and later they came here to Sugar Land too, the Blaschkes. I don't know that when and all of that stuff.

WARE: Tell me about you and your brothers growing up in Sugar Land. What kind of things did you do for fun, what kind of antics did you create?

SCHUMANN: Well, Daddy was a gardener, and, he had every stitch of that place either in the garden or we were the only one of three families that had a milk cow, in town, here. We virtually had a farm. And Daddy had a lathe house and grew Formosa fern and sold them to Houston

WARE: Huh!

SCHUMANN: And along with that we had chrysanthemums. Those are the two things that were sold. And then we had our chickens and, and a cow. Well, the kids [goats] were my playmates between my mother's death and, and our remarr--

WARE: And what was the calf's name? (laugh)

SCHUMANN: Well, we had a--all kinds of names. Sally and Sack O'Bones and this that and the other (laughing). Sack O'Bones. Well, like I say, we had our chicken yard and, a cow and a garden, and so that was so full and the neighbors let me use part of their yard when I had my 4-H calves. I had calves for the 4-H and, and my uncle furnished the calves and the feed until I sold them. I would want to pay him for that but he always let me keep that.

WARE: (laughing)

SCHUMANN: I went to school with that, along with what I made from the paper route. I don't know if I did I say anything about the paper route?

WARE: No you didn't say about the paper routes. Go ahead.

SCHUMANN: Well, my older brother was working with the lady that had the Houston Chronicle route here, and he got the agency for it. That gave us the job of delivering the Chronicle in Sugar Land. And Max and I took the papers that would come in by either bus or a man would drop them off here as he went on over all the way up to Schulenberg, dropping off the Chronicle, and we'd get it and roll our papers there in town and deliver it to different people in town. We rolled them there or somebody'd pick them up we'd have our list and we'd go on. Max would take one part of town and I'd take the other and Herbert would go on out to the prison, and we would cover Sugar Land within two hours time.

WARE: Wow.

SCHUMANN: By the time we got the papers you see, it was the Chronicle and it was after school, so we'd be home by six o'clock

WARE: (laughs) You did that every day?

SCHUMANN: Every day.

WARE: And about what years was that?

SCHUMANN: Well, 1936 to 1941.

WARE: Wow. That great. Did you make good money at that?

SCHUMANN: Well, at that time, ten cents was like a dollar, anyway.

WARE: Right (chuckling) Tell me about going to school in Sugar Land.

SCHUMANN: Well, we went to school in Sugar Land, yes. They had individual rooms in a horseshoe fashion. I understand that they sent Mr. M. R. Wood, the engineer for Sugar Land to California and he studied [their schools] and came back with the idea of that type of school. He had the first grade, the second grade, the third grade and then a library and then the auditorium, and then come your other grades. Several of them were combined by then because they're just so few [students]. That was before this high school was built. The custodian was Paueler and they lived upstairs in the auditorium. That was their home.

WARE: What was their name?

SCHUMANN: Paueler, P-a-u-e-l-e-r. They had two boys and they were my age, and so we really knew them well. Sugar Land even had movies in the auditorium; they had the projection back there in the Paueler's [apartment]. They had to go up the stairs. The auditorium of the school was where they had picture shows. I don't remember how often.

WARE: Do you remember any movies that you saw there, the names of any movies?

SCHUMANN: Oh no.

WARE: No, okay.

SCHUMANN: No. They were silent pictures. And you see, the Pauerers lived there and they had their chickens and that on the roof (starts to chuckle) of the auditorium.

WARE: (laughing) That's good. Um, if the films were silent, did somebody play the piano or organ?

SCHUMANN: For the movie? No. No, Emily McCord was the one that played the piano for the school itself, and the one that was the altar, (laughs) on Sunday.

WARE: (laughing too) Right.

SCHUMANN: They had, well, they just had a lot of activities at the school at that time. The company would have something, I just don't remember exactly, but it was Christmas time and, and we'd all get a bag of fruits and that.

WARE: There at the school?

SCHUMANN: Yeah.

WARE: Oooh.

SCHUMANN: And, it just to come back and think about that. You'd get some walnuts and things like that that you didn't ordinarily have and fruit and it was a Christmas.

WARE: Yeah. Huh. That's neat. Were there Mexican children in the school?

SCHUMANN: Only after you got into the fourth grade, did any Mexican children [attend]. Miss Johnson was THE first grade teacher. She was there so long that she taught children of some of her children.

WARE: (laughter)

SCHUMANN: She stayed with the Eisendorfs over there. She was a permanent fixture here.

WARE: (laughs)

SCHUMANN: And, she too was from Schulenberg.

WARE: Do you remember her first name?

SCHUMANN: Lima.

WARE: Lima.

SCHUMANN: Lima Johnson.

WARE: And she didn't live in the Teacherage?

SCHUMANN: No.

WARE: She lived with the Eisendorfs.

SCHUMANN: And then there's the next one, Miss O'Neal. And then Miss Henderson and Miss Anderson, that's my first three teachers.

WARE: Did they all stay a long time too? Did most of the teachers stay a long time in Sugar Land?

SCHUMANN: Oh yes. Yes, they did.

WARE: Could they stay if they got married?

SCHUMANN: Well, some of them got married and, I think there was a sort of unwritten law that the women teachers could not [be married]. None of them were married at the time that I was going to school. The home economics teacher, she married Mr. Varnau. He was a big shift foreman at that [company]. And another teacher married and stayed here. By the time I got married, my wife taught school, (chuckles) so I don't think that was one of the things there, then.

WARE: So your wife was a school teacher?

SCHUMANN: Yes.

WARE: She taught at Lakeview?

SCHUMANN: Yes.

WARE: She teaching, what class?

SCHUMANN: Oh, she only taught one year because, (laughs) we had our children.

WARE: Right

SCHUMANN: Our first one was born when she was teaching, yes. So she went to be a... (laughs)

WARE: A mom? (laughter)

SCHUMANN: (chuckling) A homemaker, then.

WARE: That's right. Were your children born here in Sugar Land?

SCHUMANN: No, at Polly Ryan, Richmond

WARE: Okay. Besides being a teacher, did your wife ever work at any other type of job?

SCHUMANN: After our children were grown she did have a job in Houston, for a few years there, when we were strapped for money and things like that. Although I worked out on the farm, it wasn't very good wages

WARE: Right

SCHUMANN: I had the house and privileges, and then at the end of the year when the crop was in, and all that, and there was distribution and, we had our bonus. But there again, when I got married, I lived out on the farm, but behind the prison there. My uncle's wife was killed in an automobile accident just before I got married, and then when I got married, my bride did NOT want to live behind that prison-- for many reasons and, one of them was that it was so dusty, She saw how dusty the house was, and you know to keep it up, and with no air conditioning!

WARE: Right

SCHUMANN: And since my aunt's death, my uncle told me that we could just move in with him and he would build a house for us. And he did but in the meantime--and we lived, my uncle and my wife and I lived in the house, HIS house.

WARE: Right

SCHUMANN: And he built that little one for us, but before THAT house was finished, he snuck off and got married.

WARE: (laughs)

SCHUMANN: And so we lived together and instead of us going into THAT little house he built, he built a house for his new wife and THEY just moved over there and left us there.

WARE: (laughing)

SCHUMANN: And so that's where all our children grew up, in the house that I still live in.

WARE: Right. Now, I want to back up a little bit. You said that you served in the military?

SCHUMANN: Yes.

WARE: Tell me when you went into the service and what it was like.

SCHUMANN: Okay. I went to A&M and you're a cadet. You had to register for the draft but with me being at A&M, I was in the enlisted reserve, so I never did sign up for the draft. I was at A&M and I was a freshman when the war [started] December the 7th .

WARE: Right.

SCHUMANN: So being my first year there, by the time May came, they had already shifted things around so that we went around the clock— there was no summer vacations. I was in the enlisted reserves so I never did register for the draft, and then, (laughs) I got a notice but I already had my enlistment number and everything, and so I wasn't drafted. Couldn't be drafted — you were already in. (chuckling while saying)

WARE: Yeah, right! (laughter)

SCHUMANN: And we were all called up. I just don't remember exactly how that was. They were pulling us out of school and putting us in uniform, but they didn't have a place for us yet, so we went BACK to school until they let us finish that semester and I went to basic training in California. My brother Max and I went together to San Antonio and then we were distributed. He went to Belvoir, as an engineer, because he was engineering.

I was in the infantry so I went to California. And when I finished at California, at basic training, we was supposed to go to officer's training school but there wasn't no opening there. So we went back to A&M and then they called us in and I went to Benning. My brother Max was in Belvoir, Virginia in engineering and he went to Italy (pronounced Italy). I washed out at Mississippi. I was going to officers training school—

WARE: Right

SCHUMANN: But, I couldn't. I messed up my leg and I couldn't keep up with it, so I washed out and I was put into the 65th Infantry and we went overseas from that point in 1944. And early '45, our unit went to France. We went on the Monticello, which was a nice cruise ship, Italian cruise ship. We landed in France in La Havre and our unit was supposed to go to England, so our supplies were in England and we were in France.

WARE: (laughing)

SCHUMANN: So there we were, in January, in France, snow up to your—and waiting for our stuff to come shipped from England to where we were in La Havre, and then we assembled and went on to the Saar River. We replaced a group that went into the Bulge, and, then we made our move into Germany. And our unit was headed to Berlin and we jumped off in March. That big push was on and we were heading to Berlin. We crossed the Rhine River on pontoon bridges, and we just leap frogging, they said our unit moved the fastest, the furthest fastest—of anything, other than Patton's group.

WARE: Okay, okay. Right.

SCHUMANN: And, Reinhart was our general and, we just leap-frogged and ended up eventually turned back and went to Linz, Austria, and then we were heading to Vienna. When Armistice was signed, we were already heading to Vienna over the Danube. And they pulled us back and we were in Linz, Austria whenever they capitulated.

SCHUMANN: Let's see, then we were an occupation unit.

WARE: Right.

SCHUMANN: And, our unit was then planned to go to Japan-- but things were as such—

WARE: Right, right.

SCHUMANN: I had a leave to go to Nice, France. So they flew us from, I think Munich, to France. My brother was in Italy. And, and I was a private with the S-2 headquarters company. And they were anticipating us going to Japan. I was in communication with my brother and I knew where he was. He wasn't VERY far from where I was, but we couldn't get to each other because of the Alps.

WARE: Right (laughs)

SCHUMANN: So I went to France. I went in the front door and out the back door and caught me a hitchhike, a ride, with different units and I looked my brother up but his unit had just moved out.

WARE: Oh!

SCHUMANN: And there was some Philipinos that were stationed there where he was and they put me up for the night and they told me they'd found out where they [brother's unit] were. He was sent to the Port of Leghorn and so here I go finding my way to the Port of Leghorn (laughing) because I was in Italy.

WARE: (laughing)

SCHUMANN: And there's lots of cooperation, they helped me and I got with a fellow from, um, African Englishman. I talked him into taking me or, he was going in that way, and I was going to go with him, and we had to go through the Italian Zone. And that was not the best of things but he was going. He was going that way so we going straight through and, along the way, why, someway or another I got onto an American truck-- and we got to Port of Leghorn, and my brother was somewhere else.

WARE: (laughing)

SCHUMANN: And so they put me up there in his bunk, that night, and anyway, then when he came back we visited there. He was in the staging area to go to the Pacific.

WARE: Right.

SCHUMANN: So we had a few days together and we went around and saw the Leaning Tower of Pisa. We have a picture of us there.

WARE: I'd love to see that.

SCHUMANN: And then he had to board ship, and well, I headed back to Nice.

WARE: (chuckles softly)

SCHUMANN: And a couple of officers picked me up and they were going to Nice, and, so here we go, in the Jeep, and went to Monte Carlo. "Well, let's go on in there."

WARE: (chuckles)

SCHUMANN: And, oh, on that trip is when they dropped the first A bomb. And, oh, we were going to into Monte Carlo and that was off limits. They threw us out of there.
(chuckles)

WARE: (laughs)

SCHUMANN: Well, anyway, then I got back to France, and went on back to my unit. By then the second bomb and then the capitulation [of the Japanese occurred] so there we were, not having to go [to Japan].

WARE: Right

SCHUMANN: So we were occupational out of it in Austria. And with that going on, why, I applied to go to school in England . They accepted it, and I went to school in England at Shrivensham University. I picked up some hours there that applied to my schooling, so when I went back to school, that gave me another boost.

But I'm going to make this back up again a little bit. While we were with that occupational thing, see that was in the springtime and the war was winding down because of Japan's capitulation. I commandeered a Jeep in going out of Steyr and went by Hitler's parents' grave. There were a bunch of GI's, got some horses and things like that, and they were having their own little rodeo.

WARE: (chuckles)

SCHUMANN: And I ran across a fellow that I knew at A&M. I went on up as far as I could with that Jeep, and then those roads got just narrower and that was the end of that. I went on back to my unit.

WARE: (laughing)

SCHUMANN: And then while I was in England, I ran across this fellow that I knew at A&M, but he was not in my outfit, you know. I ran across him in London.

WARE: Right. Now did most of the young men in Sugar Land go into the service? During World War II?

SCHUMANN: Yes, ma'am, I'm sure.

WARE: From being drafted, do you think?

SCHUMANN: I guess all kinds of ways. Well, my age group, you know, we were, very vulnerable.

WARE: Right. Okay, so you left here, you went to A&M, and then you went into the service and then you went to school in England for a little while. Then you went back to A&M?

SCHUMANN: Yes, ma'am.

WARE: Why did you come back to Sugar Land after all of that?

SCHUMANN: Well, I went to work after I got out of A&M. I went back to my uncle's place, and helped look after the farm. I looked after his cattle interests. That was what I went to school for, I had my life set on animals.

WARE: Okay.

SCHUMANN: I went and took animal husbandry and he, we had, two big places here in Sugar Land and one in Waller County. So I came to help look after the farming interests here and that's what put me on the farm here. I helped coordinate the tenant farmers and well, kind of oversee their work. And then I was head honcho over the cows.

WARE: Okay.

SCHUMANN: I was in charge of making the hay, and, and bringing the feed, the corn, and grinding the feed, and raising the weaning calves.

WARE: Okay, I have a couple of questions—

SCHUMANN: All right.

WARE: Number 1: Did you ever have any interaction with other cattle people in the area, like the Frost Ranch, or DeWalt or any of those areas?

SCHUMANN: Well, I knew them and then we had our problems. We did have at that time, a BIG problem in liver flukes.

WARE: Okay.

SCHUMANN: And in the cattle-- Dr. Schmidt over at the Angleton unit was really working on that, and he was developing drenches. And he would come out and ...

WARE: Immunize them?

SCHUMANN: No, they knew how their [the flukes] life cycle was and we were drenching the cattle to kill them. If one would die we'd cut it open and look at the livers.

WARE: Right. Right.

SCHUMANN: And then he would, we would kinda working together—

WARE: Right.

WARE: I hate to do this, but we are out of time so we have to stop for now, okay?

SCHUMANN: Okay.

WARE: We had a time limit today, but I would like to finish our interview sometime. Would you be willing to do that with me?

SCHUMANN: Sure.

WARE: Okay. And I need to—if you have any old photographs or letters or that type of thing, I would love to borrow them and copy those. Do you have anything like that?

SCHUMANN: I lost them--

WARE Oh.

SCHUMANN: We were having some work done on the house and we put these things in the trailer and they got wet.

WARE: Well—

SCHUMANN: A lot of that was destroyed.

WARE: That's okay. Thank you so much for the interview.