

# FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

## *ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE*

Interviewee: **Sidney Mellon**

Interview Date: 01/21/2012

Interviewer: Joan Hargrove

Transcriber: Olga Barr

Comment: This interview was conducted as part of a series focusing on the Foster Grant Community oral history. The interview was conducted at the Grace Community Church in Foster. 9 Pages



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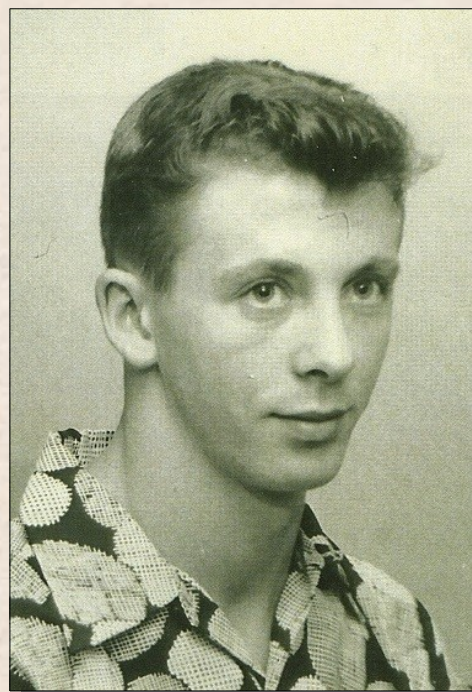
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*Transcript*

HARGROVE: Let's start with biographical information. When and where were you born?

MELLON: I was born August 15, 1949. I lived in Richmond, but I was born in a Houston hospital.

HARGROVE: What brought your family to Fort Bend County?

MELLON: My dad, Sam Mellon, was raised in Pittsburg. He had a relative or somebody who had a nephew living in Richmond. He came down and worked in their store when he was a very young man. It was a small grocery store in downtown Richmond. I think it was located next to where the barbershop is today.

HARGROVE: Your father had a grocery store also?

MELLON: My father and this man's nephew had the store together. They had a disagreement and my father took half the groceries out and opened his own store in Rosenberg.

HARGROVE: And what was it called?

MELLON: I imagine Mellon Grocery.

HARGROVE: What year would that have been?

MELLON: That had to be right about the time of The Depression, probably 1928, somewhere in there. Anyway, they moved to Rosenberg. It didn't last very long. What happened is someone came along and wanted that store. They wanted the property more than the store, so they made dad an offer he couldn't refuse. He took the offer, and decided to go back to Richmond because he felt Richmond was better for his type of grocery store.



*Drawing for groceries store owners contributed on the back of a flatbed truck.*

In Rosenberg you had a lot of farmers who grew their own products, so they didn't buy much from the grocery store. Richmond didn't have as many farmers and they bought more products from you. It was a better situation, so he moved back to Richmond. It was probably the best thing that he did, opening his own store.

HARGROVE: How many years did he have that store?

MELLON: We closed it in 1962, so from 1930-31 to 1962.

HARGROVE: Over 30 years or close to it. Did your mother work in the store, or was she a housewife?

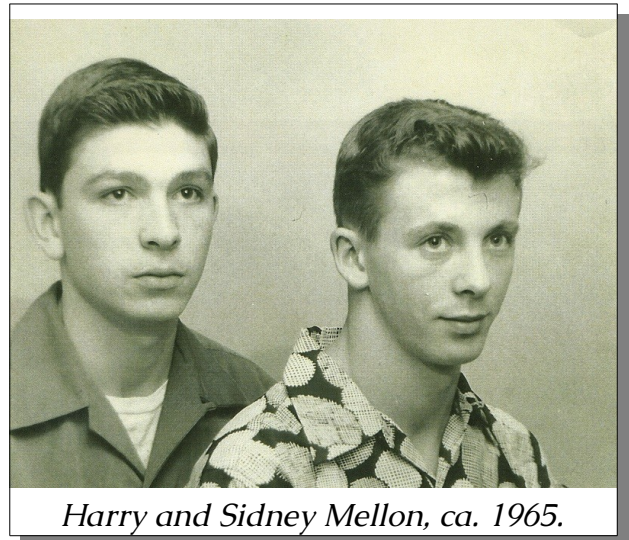
MELLON: Oh, yes.

HARGROVE: Have you ever lived outside of Fort Bend County?

MELLON: I live outside now. When I went off to school at the end of 1967, I moved to Houston to go to the University of Houston. I still live there today.

HARGROVE: What was a typical day in your childhood?

MELLON: A typical day in my childhood was going to school. I think they let out around 3:30 or 3:45. Then I came home and ride my bicycle. I usually went by the store about ten blocks away. I spent probably an hour or two in the store, sometimes more, then came home and did homework, and start all over again the next day.



*Harry and Sidney Mellon, ca. 1965.*

HARGROVE: Did your family have a garden?

MELLON: They did not have a garden. Before I was born, they did have a cattle ranch out toward Booth. They had about 250 acres out there. He raised cattle, and we used to butcher the cattle and sell them in the store.

HARGROVE: So that was your meat source? Did your mother can food?



MELLON: She did some canning. She was very good at pickles. She made a terrific sweet and sour pickle. She did some canning, not a lot. What she did do was make soap for the store. It was homemade soap. I can remember as a kid, we cut up the bars, and sold them for a nickel a piece. They were BIG size bars of soap, but it was homemade. They were so big compared to store-bought soap.

HARGROVE: Did your family offer credit to the farmers during The Depression?

MELLON: They offered credit ALL the time. We were one of the few stores that offered credit.

HARGROVE: When the farmer's crops came in, did they pay you?

MELLON: Well, we did it that way, and we also had open lines of credit. You don't see that today, but your good customers came in and they said, "I need a bag of flour, a bag of sugar, some coffee, a case of Coke, and two round steaks. Would you deliver that?" We'd deliver it. We'd make a ticket. At the end of the month, we sent them a bill. Mother did all the bookkeeping. We had quite a few customers that were on credit, and a lot of stores didn't do it.

HARGROVE: We had credit in our store too.

MELLON: It was good and it was bad. The problem we had, and it would tear my dad up, was the people ran up a big bill, maybe two months or three months. They'd say, "I'm gonna pay you, I'm gonna pay you." Then they just didn't have the money. They couldn't look you in the eye. They went across the street to our competitor and bought groceries there for cash. It just tore them up when they saw it. They owed you money, and you knew they were trading at the store across the street that didn't offer credit.

But they went over there to buy because they couldn't afford to pay you, and they couldn't look you in the face, so you lost both ways. You lost the money that they owed you, plus you lost the future sales.

HARGROVE: Tell me about your schooling.

MELLON: I went to Jane Long Elementary, which was two blocks from where we lived. Every day I came home for lunch. I did not like the cafeteria food. I can remember riding my bicycle those two blocks, coming home, watching a little TV at noon, then taking my bicycle back to school. We always had a recess after lunch, so it was no big deal.

HARGROVE: You had an open campus?

MELLON: Open campus. From there I went to Lamar in Rosenberg and had to ride the bus to Lamar Junior High, and then Lamar High School. I graduated in '67.

HARGROVE: How big was your graduating class?

MELLON: I believe it was around 250.

HARGROVE: It had gotten big by then?

MELLON: It had gotten big.

HARGROVE: How big was the high school at that time?

MELLON: The high school, I guess, was a 1,000 or 1,200.

HARGROVE: Then you said you went to college.

MELLON: University of Houston for college.

HARGROVE: What do you do now?

MELLON: Right now, my brother and I have a construction business called K&M Home Builders, but primarily we are not building homes. Primarily, we are still running the real estate company called Mellon Real Estate. When my dad died in 1963, my mother got very active in real estate. She actually formed the Fort Bend Board of Realtors.



*Fort Bend County Board of Realtors new officers are (left to right) Fred Davis, vice-president; Mrs. Cecile Mellon, secretary; and John Dullahan, president. K. E. Antone (second from right) president of the Houston Board of Realtors, installed the new officers. Outgoing president, A. K. Jacobs (far right) is shown with the group in 1966.*

There were seven people that she rounded up that were all realtors and formed this organization. The organization grew and grew and grew. When she retired, it got up to 1,100 or 1,200 members. They finally merged with the Houston Board of Realtors. It was because of her that it got its foundation. She struggled and struggled to try to keep it together. It finally took off.

HARGROVE: Excellent. Are you married?

MELLON: I'm married and have three children.

HARGROVE: What is your wife's name?

MELLON: My wife is Sharon. We met at the University of Houston. I was a sophomore; she was a freshman. We dated all through college. As soon as we both graduated, we got married the next month. We just celebrated our 40th wedding anniversary Monday. We have three children, and they are grown. One is married, and is an attorney in Dallas. The other one is an artist; he is out in California. My daughter graduated from University of Texas. She is working at the Galleria. She's a marketing major.

I have always lived in Houston. When we got married, we were in an apartment for five years, and then I built my own home. I have been in the home for the last 35 years.

HARGROVE: That's in Houston.

MELLON: In Houston, we drive out every day.

HARGROVE: Was your wife born here?

MELLON: She's from San Antonio. We met at the U of H. She got her teaching certificate, and taught for about seven years after we got married. Once we started having children, she became a stay-at-home mom.

HARGROVE: Can you tell me about you sister, Rochelle?

MELLON: Rochelle graduated from high school in 1959. She was always very good in drama. She's always loved acting and drama. She really wanted to go to New York. My mother was very conservative and very scared of Rochelle going to New York, but Rochelle finally convinced her and went to New York. She ended up in New Jersey working for a mortgage company. From there, she wanted to go out to California. She still loved the movie/acting industry.

She went out to California so she could get closer to where the movies were made. She started working for a movie studio. She worked for about 20 years, not as an actor, but in their transportation, running around picking stars up and taking them to the sets, making sure they get there on time. She's very good at what she did.

She's always had fond, fond memories of horses. She LOVES horses. She got married out there. She met a man that was also worked for the studio. They bought a horse ranch in a little town called Sylmar, which is right outside of Los Angeles, about 30 miles. They had a stable for 16 horses. She had several horses of her own. They boarded horses for other people and were were still working for the movie studio. They did this on the side.

Then when the earthquake hit California, it destroyed their home. I mean just totally destroyed it. A TV set fell and hit her husband in the head. Glass was everywhere. There were no lights. It all happened in the middle of the night. Anyway, they rebuilt the house. Shortly after they rebuilt, he got sick and passed away. It was just too much for Rochelle to take care of. She finally decided to sell it and come back home.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The 1971 San Fernando earthquake (also known as the Sylmar earthquake) occurred in the early morning of February 9 in the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains in southern California. The unanticipated thrust earthquake had a magnitude of 6.5 on the Ms scale, and a maximum Mercalli intensity of XI (Extreme). The event was one in a series that affected the Los Angeles area in the late 20th century. Damage was locally severe in the northern San Fernando Valley and surface faulting was extensive to the south of the epicenter in the mountains, as well as urban settings along city streets and neighborhoods. Uplift and other effects affected private homes and businesses. --Wikipedia

My mother had retired and had beginning stages of Alzheimer's. Rochelle decided that she would move back and take care of mother. So she came home. That was about seven years ago. She moved in with my mother. You could tell that the disease was getting worse and worse. We tried putting her in a nursing home; we just didn't feel she was getting the care that we wanted for her. So we decided to just keep her at home. We got a hospital bed. We got oxygen. We hired round-the-clock caregivers, and Rochelle supervised them until mother passed away five years ago. Rochelle is still living in Houston.

HARGROVE: She was there for your mother at the right time.

MELLON: She did an excellent job taking care of mother.

HARGROVE: What major changes have you seen in Richmond in your lifetime?

MELLON: The major change is the growth from the freeway. It is hard for me. I never thought I would see it in my lifetime how a freeway could make a difference. I knew the freeway was there, but it didn't seem to make a difference until NewQuest, which is a full-service commercial real estate company, came in. That's when everything just started moving.

HARGROVE: It is just like a boom.

MELLON: Like a boom. I've seen it in other towns, but I never thought I would see it in Rosenberg. It has definitely made a difference.

HARGROVE: In ten years, the growth is amazing.

MELLON: It's amazing. It was funny how the freeway was completed for many years, but it didn't seem to make a difference. Nothing developed, but once they got the feeder roads in, and NewQuest came in and started developing, it went like wildfire, like everything has moved to the freeway.

HARGROVE: The housing boom hit about the same time. Now there is Greatwood and all those neighborhoods.

MELLON: My brother and I have been in the building business for 40 years or longer. I've been with them 40 years, I guess 50 years. We always had just the opposite of everything else. When everything else was booming, we were slow. When everywhere else was slow, we were booming. I don't know why it was, but we dealt with the farmers. They were very conservative. They wouldn't spend their money until times got good, and they felt like they were getting more for their money.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please read Harry Lee Mellon's on this website at <https://www.fortbendcountytx.gov/home/showdocument?id=45748>

Most of the time they paid cash for a house, but By-God it better be right when you built it. That's who we catered to. We did it for many years. Then about 20 years ago, I guess, we got more involved in the real estate end, less involved in the building. Today the only building we do is for ourselves.

HARGROVE: Do you think all these subdivisions changed Richmond, or do you think it was the boom of the commercial that came in to change Richmond?



MELLON: I think it is the boom of the commercial. I don't think the residential has really changed Richmond that much. People still have to have jobs, and in order to get good jobs, they have always had to go to Houston. There are just not that many jobs available here. It is the commercial that has helped.

HARGROVE: Do you have a favorite vivid memory of growing up?

MELLON: I guess one of my favorite (chuckling) or most vivid memories is when I was a child. Three of four of my best friends rode our bicycles up and down the sidewalks of downtown Richmond. Richmond was VERY popular back then.

We blew balloons up and tied them on to the spokes. It sounded just like a motorcycle. We rode up and down the sidewalks. I felt so sorry (laughing) for the merchants. I was about eight years old, I guess.

HARGROVE: You were having a great time, and nobody bothered you?

MELLON: No, they came out and said, "Y'all need to ride those someplace else. It makes too much noise." I mean it sounded just like a motorcycle.

My brother was a professional photographer growing up. He has lots of old photos. He was probably the only photographer in Richmond going back the last 60 years. He has LOTS of pictures. They are negatives, you know, go through and blow up and print. He brought some of them to downtown Richmond during the parade. He has a picture of the mail mobile that used to deliver mail on a bus to the post office, pictures of the old bank building. He has a lot of pictures.

HARGROVE: He is like a time machine.

MELLON: Yeah, he doesn't throw anything away.

Interview ends

