

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Tarver Gayle Snedecor**

Interview Date: 04/15/16

Interviewer: Jane Goodsill

Transcriber: Sylvia Vacek

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24 Pages



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Transcript

GOODSILL: I am interviewing Tarver Gayle Snedecor for the first time. The date today is April 15, 2016. I am so pleased to be able to sit with you and hear your family story. Let's start with what brought your family to Fort Bend County.

SNEDECOR: My grandfather was living in Alabama. When he came home after the Civil War, his mother and a couple of brothers had died. His father remarried and they did not get along very well so he came to Texas.

GOODSILL: So he fought in the Civil War?

SNEDECOR: No, not really, he fought a little bit. He was going to school in Kentucky and he was just a teenager. He and his cousin took part in a small battle there; in fact he was captured temporarily in Scantville until the war was over. He tried to join up in the regular service, the Army; of course, he was from Alabama but the recruiting sergeant told him, "You are raring to get in the battle now, but when you are in there you will be ready to get right back out. So just go back home to your mother."

GOODSILL: What was his name?

SNEDECOR: Bolivar George Snedecor.

GOODSILL: How did he get the name Bolivar?

SNEDECOR: I wonder that myself. Bolivar was a great hero at that time in South America. I guess he was admired. His grandpa father's name was Victoria Gayle. He always went by the name V. Gayle He never went by his first name.

GOODSILL: Where does the name Gayle come from?

SNEDECOR: His great grandfather's father had a good friend, who was a high official and a US representative in Hale County, Alabama. He admired him and named his son after him. Through the family there must be ten or fifteen Gayle's.

GOODSILL: Including yours.



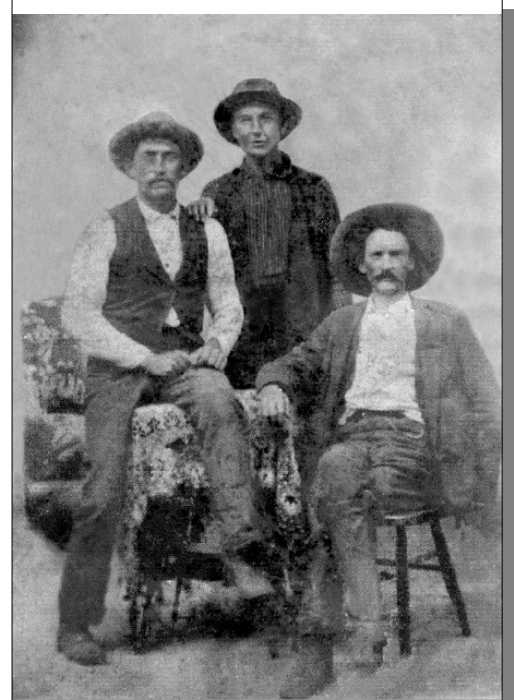
*Bolivar George and
Sallie Frances Snedecor*

SNEDECOR: My oldest son's name is Gayle too.

GOODSILL: It goes down many generations. So it was Bolivar George Snedecor that came to Texas. What happened in his life when he got here?

SNEDECOR: He looked up some friends from the county that he came from, the Dances in Brazoria County. They lived in East Columbia and had a gristmill and a machine shop. During the Civil War they made a revolver that is kind of famous today if you can get one. His obituary says that he lived there seven years and practiced medicine but he never completed his education, the war interrupted it, so I am not sure how accurate that is, maybe he was a medical assistant or something. He ended up coming to Fort Bend County.

EDITOR'S NOTE: See the page at the end of this interview describing the unique pistol manufactured by the Dances for the Confederate Army during the Civil War.



B. G. Snedecor and friends

He lived in the Snake Creek Community. Snake Creek Cemetery and the San Bernard River ran through it and ran through our farm. Of course, the San Bernard was not very far away. It was the county line between Fort Bend County and Wharton County. So it was on the far west side of Fort Bend County.

GOODSILL: When he got here what did he do and how did he get his land?

SNEDECOR: Victoria said he worked as a doctor or a medical assistant. Then he drifted over to Wharton County and got in with a group of people that sent cattle up the Chisum Trail to Kansas and he made at least one of the trips. He died before I was born but my dad told me this and I tried to write it all down.

GOODSILL: This book I am holding shows that his nickname was Bolly.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Mr. Snedecor provided ancillary materials that the interviewer reads from since Mr. Snedecor is legally blind.

SNEDECOR: That is right. They always called him Bolly. He married a girl from Fort Bend County and she was the one who had the farm property. Her name is Sally Frances Tarver.

GOODSILL: So her last name is your first name.

SNEDECOR: That's right. I got three last names. She inherited a good part of the farm where I was born on the west side of Fort Bend County. She was an orphan. Her mother and father both passed and she was staying there with some neighbors named Darst. The Darsts' were a prominent family in the area. The Snake Creek Cemetery is where a lot of my relatives are buried.

GOODSILL: So he marries Sally. If she was an orphan, how did she get land?

SNEDECOR: Her father owned the farm there. Her mother died when she was eight years old and her daddy died when she was thirteen. So she inherited this farm along with her brothers. One of them never married and stayed there with her, another brother was killed in a gun fight and the other one went out west and started a ranch in Cotulla.

GOODSILL: It says here that in September of 1881 Bolivar purchased the Tarver homestead from the Sally's brothers, George, Sam and Charles.

SNEDECOR: That's right. Sam was mentally incompetent and he ended up dying in an insane asylum in Austin.

GOODSILL: That's a sad story. Did Bolivar and Sally have children?

SNEDECOR: They had nine children. Two of them died when they were infants. Childhood diseases just decimated families back then. He lost six or seven brothers; some of them were grown but they died before they were married.

GOODSILL: Gayle was the first child born, and if I am right, Vance was the next.

SNEDECOR: I am not sure about that, but I think he is next. There are two girls.

GOODSILL: There were daughters named Opal, Karma, Inez and Sally.



SNEDECOR: Two of the girls died when they were very young. The first five were all red heads. I think her father was a red head but grandma was sandy hair and grandpa had red hair.

GOODSILL: Where did the red hair come from?

SNEDECOR: Tarver, I think. Her father and her brother were all red heads. Over the years when I ran into the Travers most of them were red heads.

GOODSILL: Your father was one of their children and his name was?

SNEDECOR: Thomas Tarver Snedecor. He was the youngest child, born in 1900.

GOODSILL: Do you want to tell us about his life?

SNEDECOR: My daddy started out as a farmer. He worked for the Department of Agriculture and then he was County Commissioner for several years in Fort Bend County.

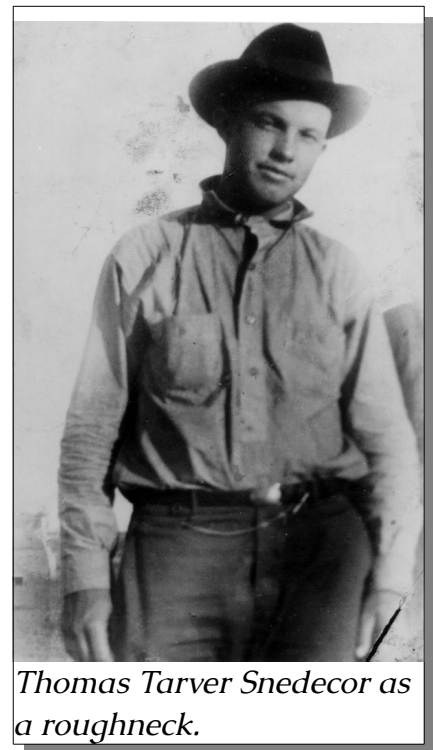
EDITOR'S NOTE: B. G. Snedecor County Commissioner Precinct 2 1893-1906.
Tom Snedecor, County Commissioner Precinct 2 1945-1948 and 1953 - 1958.

GOODSILL: He had quite a career.

SNEDECOR: He was what you'd call a leading citizen, president of the school board and local school.

GOODSILL: What kind of issues do you think he was working on as a County Commissioner in those days?

SNEDECOR: The main thing was that they wanted to get all surface roads passable. In the wintertime when it rained the roads were so bad we just had to stay at home. The schools could not operate very well because of it. The County Superintendent told him, "Tom if you hard-surface these roads I will consolidate all these schools in Fort Bend County and eliminate my job." He was head of all country schools in Fort Bend County. So that is what happened. My father first ran for office with a campaign promise of cutting taxes and having all surface roads. How he was going to cut taxes AND hard surface roads at the same time I am not sure [both laughing].



*Thomas Tarver Snedecor as
a roughneck.*

When the roads were muddy cars would slip off into the ditches. They had tires that had knobs on them and they had chains. The mail carrier went every day but he had his car set up so he could navigate the muddy roads. Most people would get stuck, your car would overheat and it was not worth the trouble so they stayed home and waited till it dried up.

GOODSILL: So that was quite an undertaking to pave all the roads?

SNEDECOR: It really was; it was a big job. Several bond issues had to be passed and voted on. Dad had to do research with the County Engineer and he had to have meetings to explain what it was going to cost. It was pretty complicated but he finally got it done.

GOODSILL: So the way they paid for it was by voting bonds?

SNEDECOR: Right and to pay off the bonds you had to raise taxes [both chuckle].

GOODSILL: But he was going to lower taxes.

SNEDECOR: That was his campaign promise but he never lowered any taxes [both laughing]. Politicians are still the same today. They haven't changed much.

GOODSILL: However, we will give him credit because he accomplished a big thing for Fort Bend County.

SNEDECOR: He really did and I am proud of him. I always have been proud of him.

GOODSILL: Do you know what year that happened?

SNEDECOR: He was first elected in 1944, I think, after World War II was over. My oldest brother, Bolivar, fought in World War II. I had three brothers and they are all veterans, and I am a veteran so we believe in our country.

GOODSILL: Tell me about your war service?



*Thomas T. Snedecor (center)
making music in Fort Bend County*

SNEDECOR: I went in right at the end of the Korean War so I fought the “Battle of Chicago.” I was on an anti-air craft on the out skirts of Chicago and we were supposed to be protecting Chicago from the Russians, I guess [both laughing].

GOODSILL: I don’t know this story. Chicago, Illinois? We thought the Russians were going to come to Chicago? Tell me about that?

SNEDECOR: All they had to do was come across Canada and they could do it.

GOODSILL: So your job was to man anti-aircraft equipment.

SNEDECOR: It was just going into anti-aircraft missiles. In fact I was assigned to a missile battalion. We had a range of about 19,000 feet even though the B50 bomber could get up to 30,000 feet. All we could do was wave at them when they went by. But they said they were watching for low level attacks. I cannot picture the Russians with a high level bomber dropping a nuclear bomb on us.

GOODSILL: So you were lucky, you didn’t see any action.

SNEDECOR: I didn’t see any action.

GOODSILL: But your brothers did?

SNEDECOR: My oldest brother did. The rest of them were all during peacetime.

GOODSILL: What branch of the service were you in?

SNEDECOR: I was in the Army.

GOODSILL: So we are back to your family. Tell us your mother’s name?

SNEDECOR: Her name was Sammie Estella Kageler. Her family came to Texas from Germany in the 1850’s, I think. She was orphaned when she was five years old. Her mother died in child birth. She lived with other relatives for quite awhile and some of them spoke German at home. She learned it but she had forgotten over the years and she didn’t use it at all. They raised nine children in the middle of the depression.

GOODSILL: Nine, again nine. Your father was the last of nine and he had nine children.

SNEDECOR: Right.

GOODSILL: Tell me what their names were and where you are in the birth order?



Portrait of Thomas Bolivar Snedecor, Tarver's oldest brother, given to their grandma.



Some of Tarver's relatives. Sisters Sammie (l) and Inez, and (back) Gayle (l), Tom, and Vance.

SNEDECOR: I am right in the middle. The oldest is Thomas Bolivar, but we call him Bolivar, then my sister Inez, my sister Bertie, my brother George, I was number 5, right in the middle, Tarver in 1933, younger brothers Lester and Aubrey Dean. He has always gone by Dean. He didn't like his first name. He was named Aubrey after an uncle since he was born on his birthday. He didn't have a chance on being named anything else. Then Vance and the last one was my sister, Sammie.

GOODSILL: Tell me about your life growing up?

SNEDECOR: I was born on my grandmother's place, the family farm, Sally Frances Tarver's place on November 17, 1933. We lived on her place with her and took care of her in her old age. It was a different time back then, it was like another world.

GOODSILL: Tell us about it. That is one of the things we are trying to capture.

SNEDECOR: I followed her around like a puppy dog and whatever she was doing, I tried to help. We did everything from scratch back then, they had to cook from scratch. They cooked all day Monday and on Tuesday they would be doing ironing. My mother said ironing and cooking took a lot of time.

GOODSILL: You could not go to the store and buy a muffin mix?

SNEDECOR: We put all our trash in a trash pile. There were no cans in it. All it had was a bunch of brown bottles – Scotch snuff bottles. My grandma dipped snuff.

GOODSILL: Your grandma?

SNEDECOR: Yea [both laughing] and I didn't know that for years later. I would go with her to the edge of the woods, the creek and she would take a knife out of her apron pocket. All women wore aprons then during the day. She cut off a twig and she would chew the end of it till it was frayed and she called it cleaning her teeth. I thought she meant brushing but she would clean that tobacco off her teeth so it would not show, I guess.

GOODSILL: What was on the trash pile? Corn husks, vegetables and potato peelings?

SNEDECOR: We recycled and there was not much there at all. We didn't buy anything in cans. When we went to the store they dipped out how much we wanted. We only bought flour, sugar and cheese, which came in boxes. No one today knows about the boxes, they were made out of wood, well-built boxes. We always had a black guy living on the place and he would do chores. In the summertime he would do things he could get paid for but otherwise it was chores around the house for his room and board.

GOODSILL: What was his name?

SNEDECOR: His name was Uncle Ned Briscoe. We called all the elderly black people aunt and uncle. They had to call us Mister and Miss, even when we were kids. There was all kinds of rules and regulations. None were written down but segregation rules were strictly enforced. We enjoyed talking to him, us kids, after the work was done in the evening. He would tell us ghost stories and something about his history. He said he was born a slave in Mississippi. He said he was just a kid when they told him the slaves were free and he said he just went running and jumped over the back fence and he never looked back. We asked him if he ever got married and he said, "No I never got married but I got children all up and down the Mississippi." He would even do a dance for us called the shuffle.

GOODSILL: His name was Briscoe? Do you suppose he was named after the slave master?

SNEDECOR: I'm sure he was.

GOODSILL: Here in Fort Bend County there is a Briscoe and they came from Mississippi.

SNEDECOR: Well, I just wonder about that. A lot of them drifted over from that area.

GOODSILL: I interviewed Mr. Mason Briscoe and he talks about his relative Parmenas Briscoe. He begins his interview saying, "He had five children and every time one of them got in trouble he would send them to Texas. They all ended up down here." [both laughing]. You are talking about how things were different, they set a special day aside for each task. Washing, ironing?

EDITOR'S NOTE: See Mason Briscoe interview on this web site at

<http://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/modules/showdocument.aspx?documentid=37309>

SNEDECOR: Yes. Cooking was every day. For breakfast they always made biscuits and for lunch, they called it dinner then, they made corn bread and grandma would always try to make enough at dinner to eat left overs at supper, so she wouldn't have to cook three meals a day.

GOODSILL: Did they make bread as well?

SNEDECOR: My grandma's people did not make yeast rising bread but my mother's folks did. Early settlers didn't make yeast rising bread.

GOODSILL: Yeast rising bread takes longer, you have to get up early in the day to make it so it is ready at noon. Also, if it was very humid it is very hard to get the yeast to act properly to rise.

SNEDECOR: Mostly it was the German immigrants that made the yeast rising bread. It took a skill and quite a bit of time to make it. The breads they were making were called quick breads. I lived with my aunt for about a year and I used to watch her make biscuits every morning. She had a large shallow wooden bowl that she would put a bunch of flour on to start with and she would put milk and lard in it. She used her hands, she never used a tool. She would put a pinch of this and a double pinch of that and everyone seemed to turn out perfect [both laughing].

GOODSILL: Don't you just love biscuits?

SNEDECOR: They were really good. Momma could make that yeast rising bread but she was not good at biscuits. We always had butter.

GOODSILL: Where did the butter come from?

SNEDECOR: We had four or five milk cows. They were not dairy cows, just range cattle.

GOODSILL: But you could still milk them?

SNEDECOR: Oh, yea.

GOODSILL: Tell me about making butter.

SNEDECOR: First you skim the cream off of the milk; the cream rises to the top over night. You skim it off and then you take a churn; they are different kinds of churns. The one we had had a crank on the side and it had flappers in there and as you agitate the cream the butter separates. That's where butter comes from, the cream. The butter would separate and what was left was buttermilk.

GOODSILL: Whose job was it to make the butter?

SNEDECOR: We kids would help; it took a long time to churn.

GOODSILL: How long?

SNEDECOR: I don't know, twenty or thirty minutes. Momma had a form that would make a pound of butter. If we didn't eat all of it she could sell it. In winter and spring when you didn't have much cash she would sell her butter and her eggs. She called it her butter-and-egg money.

GOODSILL: How was the butter stored with no refrigeration back then?

SNEDECOR: You tried to put it in the coolest place you could but it would still get soft. In the early years we did not have any refrigeration and we would keep the milk in a thing almost like a chicken coop. We'd put it outside in the shade with some cloth on the top of it, and out to the side of it so it would catch a breeze. The wet cloth was supposed to keep the milk a little cooler. It spoiled in a hurry and it didn't keep very long.

GOODSILL: So you always smelled your milk before you drank it to make sure it was good?

SNEDECOR: Yea, we called it blinky milk. Fresh milk was always coming in, we milked cows twice a day.

GOODSILL: How often was the butter made?

SNEDECOR: It was made every two or three days.

GOODSILL: Because it could not be kept very long so you made it fresh all the time?

SNEDECOR: The cream was sour just like the milk but you could still make butter with it but I never noticed the sour taste in the butter even though it was made out of sour cream.

GOODSILL: Even after the milk had soured you could use the cream to make butter.

SNEDECOR: Yes.

GOODSILL: But your mom couldn't sell that.

SNEDECOR: Oh, yea. She could sell it; just put a little salt with it [both laughing]. They sold anything they could.

GOODSILL: Tell us about what happened at nighttime in your house?

SNEDECOR: We had no electricity when I was very young. We finally got some later on. We used kerosene lamps, my grandma called them coal oil lamps. I guess they used coal oil in the early days until kerosene was invented.

GOODSILL: Do you remember the smell?

SNEDECOR: Oh yea.

GOODSILL: Did you like it?

SNEDECOR: I put up with it [both laughing]. We used kerosene for lights but we also used it to disinfect, if we scraped a leg or foot or something we would put kerosene on it. I am not sure how good it was, but we all survived.

GOODSILL: Were you very stingy about lighting the candle?

SNEDECOR: No, we were not stingy about that, but after three years we got a battery operated radio. Today they would be AA batteries, but back then they were huge and expensive. So we were rationed to using the radio thirty minutes a day and then we would have to cut it off.

GOODSILL: I bet you loved that radio time.

SNEDECOR: We picked our favorite evening for shows to listen to it. I remember one of our favorites was I Love A Mystery. When we first got electricity about 1938 we had one wire hanging from the ceiling with a screw bulb. We'd put a table under that light.

When we finally got an electric radio and plugged it in, we would all sit around the center of the room and listen to that radio. Later on after we got electric radios, momma could listen to soap operas during the day. Oh, she loved those!

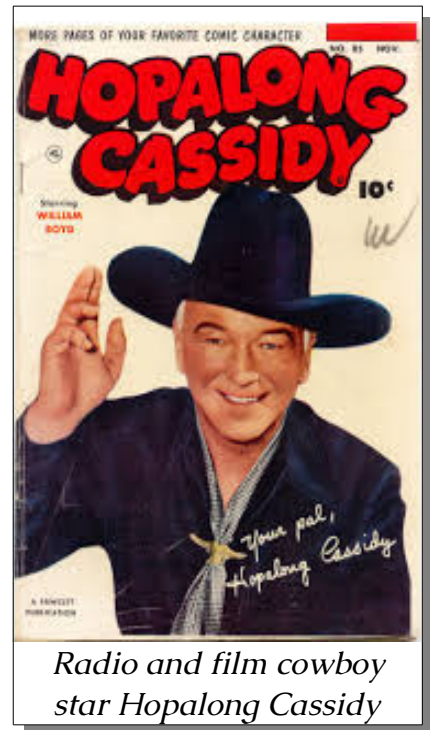
GOODSILL: Did you listen to the news?

SNEDECOR: Daddy listened to the news, but we kids wanted to listen to Gene Autry or Roy Rogers or Hopalong Cassidy.

OODSILL: When World War II came along, did you follow it on the radio? You were about nine when the war started?

SNEDECOR: We did a little bit but I was at the age that I didn't even care about it. My parents would listen to it over the radio and that was the only news besides word of mouth.

GOODSILL: How about water? Was there running water?



SNEDECOR: No, in the early days we had a water well and we had to pump the water out. One of my first jobs was getting water and bringing it to the house in a bucket. We had two and half to three gallon buckets, that was all I could carry but it was enough to last for a while. We had one bucket on the porch with a wash pan beside it and a dipper that you could drink out of. You poured some of it in the wash pan and everybody washed their hands. By the time the last person got through it was pretty dirty.

We got dirty working outdoors. In the spring time the first thing we tried to do when it got a little bit warmer we would beg my mother if we could take our shoes off. After we took them off, except for going to town we never put them back on. But she made us wash our feet before we went to bed and I just hated to do that. I asked one time if I could just put on socks and go to bed [both laughing].

GOODSILL: What did she say?

SNEDECOR: No.

GOODSILL: Why do you suppose you hated washing your feet so much?

SNEDECOR: It was no big deal, dirty feet wouldn't hurt anything.

GOODSILL: That is not what they say in the Army [both laughing].

SNEDECOR: Every Saturday we had to take a bath. After running around in the mud during the day we would bath about once a week in a number three wash tub and you had to carry all the water. After the kids got through bathing it was thick enough to almost stand.

GOODSILL: With two parents and nine children how did the pecking order go for bathing?

SNEDECOR: The big kids bathe first. The little kids had to use a two-foot tub and momma would come in and help us bath. We had to carry all that water in and out from the well. In the winter time we had to carry a little hot water from the tea kettle on the stove and pour it in there to make sure it wasn't too cold.

GOODSILL: Now we just turn on the faucet and take it for granted.

SNEDECOR: Absolutely. We are just so fortunate in this digital age. It is amazing. Like I said, I was born in a different world.

GOODSILL: Do you remember when the telephone came along?

SNEDECOR: Well, I was grown and left home and we still didn't have a telephone. When I was in the Army I think they got their first phone. But it was amazing how word could get around the neighborhood without having one. When they finally got a telephone it was a party line. You had a code and so many rings, of course when the phone rang everybody picked up anyway. If the call wasn't for you, you stayed on the line wanting to hear what they said [both laughing]. One time my mother got a private call she really wanted to keep private so she said, "Would everybody please hang up? and you heard a thump.

GOODSILL: How about clothing? Where did you get your clothes? Hand-me-downs from the kid above you?

SNEDECOR: Absolutely. We wore a lot of hand-me-downs. Nobody had garage sales back then, there wouldn't be anything to put in it. When the women wore long dresses they would use them to dry dishes on and dry yourself on. We never bought any towels.

GOODSILL: I never thought about that.

SNEDECOR: Smaller rags we used as wash rags.

GOODSILL: Was there a time of year when you would get a new pair of pants?

SNEDECOR: They tried to get us clothes before we started to school and, if possible, we wore old clothes if they didn't have too many patches on them. Amazingly now you can buy clothes with patches already on them!

GOODSILL: Isn't that something, even ripped and torn? You can pay extra for that.

SNEDECOR: They first started making them like they are faded like they are old blue jeans. I remember I had a pair of shorts, my favorite blue jean shorts and I asked my daughter-in-law to get me some just like this and she found some that was already faded out when she bought them. I told her I didn't really mean old shorts. What was embarrassing when we were young turned out to be what people want now!

GOODSILL: Did you wear blue jeans when you were a youngster.

SNEDECOR: No. We mostly wore overalls, striped overalls, and they had two straps. Some people wore blue jeans but not very many. The early blue jeans were Levi Strauss. They were made with heavy ducking and they were not that comfortable.

GOODSILL: What fabric was the coveralls made of?

SNEDECOR: They were all cotton.

GOODSILL: Where did you go to shop?

SNEDECOR: I think the store that sold clothes they called it a department store in downtown Needville and they sold nothing but clothes. They would have a bunch of socks hanging down from the ceiling and if you needed a pair, you would jerk a pair down. On Saturday in the summertime when people got a little money from selling cotton, the streets would be completely packed with vehicles and people walking.

GOODSILL: They came to shop and socialize and they came to trade. Did you like it?

SNEDECOR: Oh, we loved it.

GOODSILL: How long did it take to get to downtown Needville?

SNEDECOR: It took maybe thirty minutes with these old cars we had.

GOODSILL: So you did have an old car?

SNEDECOR: Always an old car [both laughing]. I can't remember when we bought a new one.

GOODSILL: Tell me about going to church?

SNEDECOR: We didn't go to church and I don't remember anybody in our community who went to church. I started going after I was grown. Education was important. We all went to country schools back then at the William School, where most of kids went. It had three rooms – three grades per room.

GOODSILL: You had a lot of your brothers and sisters right in your classroom. The Snedecor's could probably start their own school.

SNEDECOR: Well it would be one classroom up and one classroom over. School was about four miles away and we had to ride horses. The parking lot then was a horse stable and everybody put their horses in it and tied them up until it was time to go home.

GOODSILL: How many horses could your dad spare to get you kids back and forth to school?

SNEDECOR: We doubled up and occasionally one of the neighbors rode with us, we would triple up. It took at least three horses to get us to school.

SNEDECOR: We doubled up and occasionally one of the neighbors rode with us, we would triple up. It took at least three horses to get us to school.

GOODSILL: Then the horse would stand around all day?

SNEDECOR: Yes, we would loosen the girths some so it wasn't binding and they would have to stand all day without food or water. The stable had a roof on it. Daddy had to get up in time and feed those horses, water them and saddle them all up and momma had to get us ready with our lunch buckets. She fixed lunch for us. Our lunch buckets were empty syrup cans.

GOODSILL: Empty syrup cans. Describe what they looked like?

SNEDECOR: They looked like a regular half gallon bucket, I guess, round, just like a small bucket. It had a handle on top so we could tie it to a saddle.

GOODSILL: What was in your little bucket?

SNEDECOR: Any kind of left overs that momma could rig up. Sometimes I got biscuits and jelly or biscuits and syrup. Like I said, momma wasn't the best in making biscuits and those things would get hard by the time we ate them and they would stick in your throat [both laughing]. We didn't have anything to drink with them and we had to get over to the water fountain at school in order to drink. So every now and then you would see someone with a regular made sandwich with an apple and an orange, they were the rich kids.

SNEDECOR: One time the school started getting sent surplus agriculture products. This later evolved into the Food Stamp Program. We got a bushel of apples and case of canned milk from the Department of Agriculture once. It didn't take long to get rid of those apples but we didn't know what to do with that canned milk for a long time. One of the best teachers I ever had, Ms Schneider, had us bring chocolate, and some of us brought sugar and she made big pots of chocolate milk and canned milk and that was delicious. That was a treat.

GOODSILL: When you went to school, were you wearing your overalls?

SNEDECOR: Yes.

GOODSILL: They were just utilitarian clothes and no matter how little or big you got they would probably still fit?

SNEDECOR: Well they had straps and you could loosen the straps up and make them longer [both laughing] when you grew taller.

GOODSILL: Were their guns in your house at all?

SNEDECOR: Yes. We had a few, not as many as you might think.

GOODSILL: What did you use them for?

SNEDECOR: They were used for hunting. We would hunt squirrels, rabbits, ducks and whatever. Just for fun but we ate some, except we brought a raccoon home one time that we shot. Momma wasn't used to cooking raccoon [both laughing]. She tried it but it didn't turn out very well.

GOODSILL: That sounds bad. Did you learn how to do things when you were growing up? Did you learn how to fix things, mechanical things?

SNEDECOR: Yes. Living on a farm you were always trying to repair something and one of the earliest jobs was keeping up the fence so the cows wouldn't walk through it. A barbwire fence which had three wires could get slack in them and the grass would look greener on the other side, tempting the cows. We tried to fix those old fences up. That was one of the jobs that the black people that lived with us did. Also, we had a teenager living with us. He was a migrant farm worker and he just stayed with us and decided not to leave.

GOODSILL: Was he a white kid?

SNEDECOR: Yes, he was a white kid. I will tell you a lesson on race. I was about three or four years old. I hadn't started school. It was my job to take water to the workers in the field who were chopping or picking cotton. I was to take them some water.

The white kid living with us was a teenager named W. T. Pittman. He and Uncle Ned Briscoe were out picking cotton and he hollered, "Water, Jack." That's what they hollered when they wanted water. I went to the well and pumped a bucket of water and brought a tin cup and took it to them. The first one I got to was Uncle Ned and I said, "Uncle Ned, do you want some water?" He said, "Yea, I will take some." So he drank a cup or two and then I took it to W. T. because he was the one hollering for it. He said, "I don't want any. "What do you mean W. T.? You are the one who hollered for it?" He said, "I just don't want it."

So I went back home and told mamma, "What's the matter with W. T.? He asked for water and he didn't drink any." "You need to learn to never let the black guy drinks first. If he drinks first the white person will not drink after him." I said, "It is all one cup that is hanging on the nail." After a while W. T. came tromping in to get a drink for himself. I had to learn the rules.

The way we acted was pitiful. I have a daughter-in-law whose is black, we love her; she is just a wonderful gal. My oldest brothers couldn't get over that my youngest boy married her; she is half black and half German white. They were walking down the hall one day, my mother was in the hospital and my brothers said, "What do you think about that?" I said, "That is something you need to get over." There is division in families between black and white. We should be ashamed of ourselves the way we treated people. I was born an old red-neck southerner but I do not agree the way we treated them.

Since my daughter-in-law, Miriam, married my youngest son, Michael, has been with her and I have seen how people treat her. She was born and raised in Colorado Springs, Colorado, which is less racist than anywhere that I know of. She just runs into this all over the place. My son, Michael, is a veteran, a doctor retired from the U. S. Air Force. We went to see them on a tour. I had gone up to Pennsylvania, and stopped at Lancaster at the Amish theater. My youngest daughter wanted to see that and so we all spent a night or two up there. My daughter-in-law was at the end of the counter waiting for us to get all the information we could. We went over there and she had not been waited on. We walked over to see what was the matter and the lady behind the counter looked at my daughter and said, "Can I help you ma'am?" "This lady has been standing here all this time. You can't help me. You need to help HER." She would not even look over at my daughter-in-law, she just said, "Can I help you ma'am?" She said, "No you can't help me. "We ought to pack up and go back home." That is the kind of thing the poor girl has had and still has all her life.

Uncle Ned bunked in a corn crib and he ate the same thing we ate but second table. He said "Yes, sir" and "No, sir" and he lived till his mid-nineties, I guess. A year or two after he died, a black man rode up and I saw him talking to my dad at the old farmhouse where I was born. About that time we turned it into a barn and built another house. He asked daddy if he could stay with us and daddy said, "Yes, you can bunk in the barn." He was from Route Point, which is a black community not far from here.

I would go out there and we would shuck and shell corn for the chickens and hogs and he would tell me stories about the early days out in Route Point and the early days in Georgia and I still remember some of them.

GOODSILL: What was that gentleman's name?

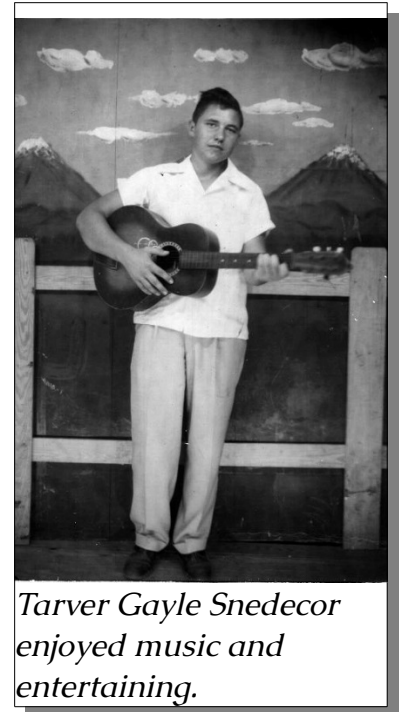
SNEDECOR: Rafe Vinson. They were all tall, lean people. He had a brother that was seven feet tall. I guess they came from that tribe in Africa. I really enjoyed visiting with him. He told a story about my grandpa one time that there was a ranch that was surrounded on three sides by one of the Moore's Ranches. The Moore's had a lot of land in Fort Bend County. One time Grandpa was assigned as an overseer, I guess you call it, at that ranch. Rafe Vinson and his three sisters were wading in Snow Creek playing around and they looked up and there was my grandpa sitting on a horse watching them. He said he was a fierce looking man. He had a mustache and a .44 strapped to his hip and a .32 Winchester. They were so scared that one of his sisters sat down in the water and got her undies all wet [both laughing]. He said grandpa just laughed around and rode off.

We all went to country schools, Williams Country School. Every Christmas we would throw a big play at school. We prepared for it weeks in advance. Those old school houses were two rooms in a row and it was made with doors that you could open up the whole thing and make it like an auditorium. When we had our Christmas plays the place would be packed and you couldn't stir them with a stick in there. We did religious plays as well as other plays and I first learned the Lord's Prayer in school because we did not go to church.

I remember one time they had me pantomiming with a microphone and singing Bing Crosby's "White Christmas". Behind the curtain they had an old wind up phonograph and they were playing the record. [both laughing]. After it was over one of my neighbors, a German woman said, "I didn't know you could sing so well!" [in her German voice] [both laughing]. It was a big time and then we would have a two or three week vacation. We never went anywhere on vacation.

GOODSILL: No traveling?

SNEDECOR: The first time I went on vacation I was living with my 89 year old Aunt Carmen for about a year. She was the old maid of the family. A migrant worker came through in the early '30's. He decided to stay and put a crop in for my daddy. Aunt Carmen married him.



My uncle Aubrey owned a little farm up the creek and he moved a house in there and he let them live in it. He tried to farm a little bit and when World War II came and jobs were so readily available he thought he could get work out in the country. He went to work on a construction job and then went to work at Jefferson Lake Sulphur Company as a guard. Anyway, he could not commute during the war because the gas was rationed. Aunt Carmen ended up staying by herself and told daddy that she didn't like staying by herself. "Send one of the kids up there to stay with me." So he got the first one that came running in the room, which happened to be me. "Put some clothes in a sack. You are going to stay with Aunt Carmen for a while." I really did not want to but I didn't have a choice.

When I look back, it was a real, good experience. She told me a lot of her history and I enjoyed writing it down. She was still cooking everything on a wood stove from scratch and made biscuits every morning and cornbread.

GOODSILL: You probably gained some weight?

SNEDECOR: She put weight on me. She was a real good cook. Part of this was during school. I had a bicycle that I was able to ride up there and she lived closer to the school then we did.

GOODSILL: You went to school here and then what happened after that?

SNEDECOR: After that I was working for the Department of Agriculture surveying cotton land and acres. The supervisor up there was a good friend of dad's and I think he got me a job. After graduating high school, I went to Wharton Junior College for one year. I took up engineering and they said they could not offer me any more courses; I had to start somewhere else. So I went to the University of Houston in finance. I had to get a job full time instead of part time.

My brother did not finish high school and he got a GED after serving in World War II. They paid for his education to go to college and he was still going when I was living with him but he ended up getting a degree and he never finished high school. My parent's goal for all us kids was to finish high school and after that if you wanted to go further you were on your own. I was having problems so I decided I was going to quit work and join the Air Force or Army and when I got out they could pay for my education like they did my brother's. I did not look into it and when I got out, the GI Bill I had was completely different from his. They paid hardly anything.

GOODSILL: Did you learn any skills when you were in the Army?

SNEDECOR: Yes. I went to radio school and radar school in the Army. I was training in the Army to call fire control in artillery. We had telescopes and two people would get on the airplane coming in and they would try to hook up the guns, point the guns to shoot. After I got to Chicago that was all obsolete and they got radar. I was self-taught on radar and when I finished I was a radar repairman. When I got out I kind of used that to get my first job working on seismograph boats. They had a map and they would run dynamite and get their readings and pin point on their map and go to another spot and get another one and that is the way they did their job.

GOODSILL: Were they trying to make maps or were they trying to find oil?

SNEDECOR: To find oil. Seismograph would release dynamite and the seismograph could bounce off and they would know where the layers of rocks down there or something. I worked on the radar and we told them what direction to go and when to stop. It was an old system that GPS, I guess you call it but we were not as accurate as GPS would be. Motion sickness really got to me after a while, so I quit and went to work in an oil refinery at home.

GOODSILL: Is that when you were a lay operator?

SNEDECOR: Yes. I fought the "Battle of Chicago" for two years and lost the battle [both laughing]. It wasn't true, to tell the story. I met a young red head named Carol Milnes. We were married for three days and I took her to Texas and she never minded it. Sometimes she would get home sick in the wintertime but she liked Texas. When I was working on that seismograph boat we would work for ten days and get off five. She was staying with my folks and she would put on her blue jeans and a cowboy hat. She wanted to be a cowboy. My younger brother put her on a horse that was half wild, he hit the horse on the back end and she ran away with Carol. That ended her cowgirl career [both laughing]. I could hardly get her on a horse after that.

GOODSILL: So you worked in some oil refineries and then what?

SNEDECOR: Well, I went to work on shut down in Texas City. We were staying with my uncle's sister in Hitchcock. I worked there for two or three months and I was laid off. I was a construction worker. My dad said, "Come on home; we can find you a job down here." So I came home and we went around different chemical plants. While I had been in Texas City I put in applications at the refineries and chemical plants. I came back home and eventually Phillips Petroleum called me to come to work. I worked for them for about forty years.

GOODSILL: What was your final position with them?

SNEDECOR: I was a supervisor, a work planner.

GOODSILL: Work planner, what does that mean?

SNEDECOR: Well, you put out a schedule for all machinists and mechanical engineers to work the next day. You had to find work for them and put it on the schedule and guess how long it would take, that sort of thing. I really enjoyed it. I would have to sit in on supervisors during shut downs and I enjoyed that. They were a good company.

GOODSILL: Could you tell us about the Snake Creek Cemetery?

SNEDECOR: Well, it is a cemetery that was maybe a road to somewhere at one time but now it is back on somebody's property and it is hard to get to. My great grandfather and great grandmother, Thomas and Frances Tarver are buried there. Grandma's brother, Uncle Lester, is buried there and ten or fifteen of my relatives are buried there. After I got out of the Army we got the whole bunch together and cleaned it up, it was all grown over. A handful of us have been trying to keep it up ever since then but we are getting old. I was wishing maybe that the state or the county or somebody had a program to keep the little cemeteries up. We have a veteran of the Texas Revolution buried there, Emory Darst. Several Civil War veterans and other war veterans are buried there. It is a historical cemetery



Snake Creek Cemetery, Needville, Fort Bend County, was designated as a Historic Texas Cemetery in 1985.

GOODSILL: Here we go, "Snake Creek Cemetery Leads to Discovery of Texas Hero" an article by Marge Crumbaker, on Emory H. Darst, the great grandson of Daniel Boone.

SNEDECOR: I do not know if it is true or not that Santa Anna came through here during the Texas Revolution and some of his troops died and they were buried in that cemetery.

GOODSILL: Is that right? Are their graves marked?

SNEDECOR: They are not marked so we don't know if it is true or not. There is a name at the cemetery, Rufus Pavlicek. She lived in Richmond all her life and is probably over 90 now. She was one of our group.

GOODSILL: Thank you so much for sharing your story with us!

SNEDECOR: You are welcome.

Interview ends.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Civil War firearms manufactured by J. H. Dance and Company are among the most highly prized antique weapons, valued for their fine craftsmanship as well as their rarity. From July 1862 through May 1865 the company produced six-shot Colt-pattern revolvers in both .44 and .36 caliber; total output was fewer than 400. The family originated in North Carolina and moved to Alabama before settling in West Columbia, Texas. They prospered before the Civil War manufacturing gristmills and cotton gins.

At the outbreak of the Civil War James Dance enlisted in the Brazoria Volunteers. His brothers George, David, and Isaac also enlisted, but because of their abilities and skills they were detailed to their factory at Columbia by early May 1862. Initially the Dances' primary tasks were mounting cannons and repairing wagons for the Confederate Army. In April 1862 George Dance wrote Governor F. R. Lubbock requesting an advance of \$5,000 to begin firearm production with an output of fifty revolvers a week. While production was somewhat slower than originally anticipated, by October 2, 1862, the Dances were able to ship a dozen revolvers to the San Antonio Arsenal.



Distinctive Dance Brothers .44 caliber civil war revolver manufactured without a recoil shield giving it a flatter appearance.

--courtesy <http://www.oldsouthantiques.com/>

When the Union learned of the Dance weapons plant, it became a target for destruction. The appearance of federal warships on the Brazos River created further concern they could be invaded so they moved the foundry several miles inland to Grimes County but weapons manufacture never resumed and the family returned to manufacturing gristmills and cotton gins.