

# FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

## *ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE*

Interviewee: **Adolph Aloise Bellinoski**

Interview Date: 01/21/2012

Interviewer: Jo Ann Hargrove

Transcriber: Carlos Rubalcaba

Location: Foster Community Center, Foster, Texas

9 Pages



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*Transcript*

HARGROVE: When and where were you born?

BELLINOSKI: I was born in New Waverly, Texas, on November 21st, 1924. I came to Fort Bend County in the spring of 1947, 65 years ago.

HARGROVE: Were you born in a hospital, or were you born at home?

BELLINOSKI: I was born at home with a midwife, I think. I am not sure of that, I don't remember (chuckles).

HARGROVE: What brought your family to Texas?

BELLINOSKI: My grandfather came here from Poland. I don't remember what year. They settled in the northern part of the United States around Joplin, Illinois. He was a coal miner there for a number of years. Then they started having a lot of cave-ins and mishaps with the coal mine, and my grandmother decided it was a place to leave. So they moved to Texas. My grandfather's brother was already in Bremond, Texas. So they came to Bremond for a while and tried farming. They almost starved to death, and they decided to go back to Illinois again. They moved back to Illinois, stayed there for a few years. My mother recalls being there as a teenager. After several years, they still had a lot of problems in the coal mines, and they decided come back to Texas. This time they moved to New Waverly where there was a large Polish settlement. My grandfather lived to be ninety-one years old.

HARGROVE: What was his name?

BELLINOSKI: His name was Louis Kachemba. My grandmother died before I was born, I never did see her. I am talking about the grandparents on my mother's side. That's how we wound up in Texas.

HARGROVE: What type of work did your grandfather do in Texas?

BELLINOSKI: They were farmers mostly, raising cotton. I think he had about a 125 acres.

HARGROVE: How did the family get to Fort Bend County?

BELLINOSKI: I was the one who came to Fort Bend County. I joined the navy in 1942 at the beginning of World War II. I served aboard the *USS Pennsylvania* for four years. Coming out of the service at that time was bad. Everybody and their brother was being discharged. There were thousands of people looking for work.

I would say it was probably one of the worst times of my life...I couldn't find work. There were ten people looking for every job that was available. I did pick up a few little old jobs in Houston, making about seventy-five cents an hour. I finally started working at Hudson Engineering. They built these water towers for power plants. I worked there for a while because that was the only job I could find. I worked as a lay out man. After several months, they started paying me a dollar and a quarter an hour, which I thought was real good. But we didn't have a place to live, and we rented an apartment from Tom Hunt.

Tom Hunt was the owner of Hunt Tool Company there in Houston. I got acquainted with him, after we were living in their apartment. He asked me if I would like to come work for him. I was about 21 years old I guess. I said, "Yes." He said, "I will start you off at a dollar an hour." I was taking a twenty-five cent an hour cut, but that was the best move I ever made. Mr. Hunt was a very fine man. I worked for him for 35 years until he died.

He owned a big ranch out at Simonton, Texas. He asked me to go out there after about a year, and in 1947 I started working for him in Simonton. I did electrical work while I was there in Houston, and I learned to do a little welding. At the ranch, I primarily did all the maintenance work. I liked it. I was still employed by Hunt Tool Company in Houston. After about a year or so, he built a house and offered us a place to live, so I took him up on that. I would say one thing about Mr. Tom Hunt; he was one of the greatest, one of the smartest men that I ever met in my life. He was a multimillionaire, but you would not have known it. He taught me a whole lot. We used to sit and talk a whole lot and he's say, "I can only sleep in one bed, I can only wear one pair of pants, what else is there? There is nothing else." You would have never known he was worth the money that he was worth. After he died, fortunately he left me the house that I was living in. My wife and I stayed there, and we adopted two children that we raised. They both turned out to be real good. My son lives out at the old home place in New Waverly, and my daughter lives next door to me.

HARGROVE: How many grandchildren do you have?

BELLINOSKI: I have four grandchildren, four granddaughters. Two of them live in this area. Two of them live there with my daughter, and two of them live with my son in New Waverly.

HARGROVE: Tell me about the Bellinoski grandparents.

BELLINOSKI: I don't know much about them because they both died before I was born.

HARGROVE: What about your father? Can you tell me about your father and his name?

BELLINOSKI: My father's name was Ignatius Bellinoski. He died at an early age. He was about 55 years old. He died with cancer.

HARGROVE: What kind of work did he do?

BELLINOSKI: He was a blacksmith.

HARGROVE: Do you have any brothers and sisters?

BELLINOSKI: Yes, I have one adopted brother, and I have three sisters, two of them are still living. They are both in Houston, Texas. My adopted brother was in St. Louis, Missouri, but he died several years ago.

HARGROVE: Did you have a garden at your house in Simonton?

BELLINOSKI: Yes Ma'am. All the years that we lived there, my wife insisted on a garden. We planted a garden, fall and spring every year. She loved to garden.

HARGROVE: Did she do canning? Make jelly and things like that?

BELLINOSKI: Yes, Ma'am!

HARGROVE: Did you keep any animals, cows or sheep or goats?

BELLINOSKI: Yes, I wound up being in the cattle business. At one time, I was running about four hundred head. I am down (chuckles)...I can't take care of that many anymore. So I am down to about 50 head now.

HARGROVE: Were you involved in butchering animals for your own family?

BELLINOSKI: We did at one time. The processing got so expensive, and what usually happened when we butchered an animal was that we always ate the good stuff first and then we had all the other stuff left over. We finally decided this was the wrong thing to do. So we started buying our meat and selling the animals.

HARGROVE: Smart. Where did you go to school?

BELLINOSKI: I went to New Waverly High School. After I joined the Navy, I attended special training at the University of Minnesota, in the electrical field.

HARGROVE: What did you do for recreation or relaxation when you were growing up?

BELLINOSKI: I always enjoyed deer hunting quite a bit. That was my favorite.

HARGROVE: Were there any community activities you were involved in like the fair or the live stock show?

BELLINOSKI: Yes, my grandchildren showed at the Fort Bend County Fair, and my oldest granddaughters showed at the Huntsville Fair.

BELLINOSKI: Can you tell me about a typical day when you were growing up, your boyhood? What kinds of things you did?

BELLINOSKI: When I came home, we always had chores to do. We lived on a farm; we had animals to take care of. We had horses and mules that we used to plow with, and we also had cows that we had to milk. We had hogs that we had to feed, and we also had chickens that we had to care for. So, really in my childhood, there was not too much time for playing, it was always work.

HARGROVE: Definitely work. Are you a member of any clubs or organizations?

BELLINOSKI: Yes, Ma'am. I am a member of the Knights of Columbus of the third degree and I am also a fourth degree member of the Knights of Columbus in Wallis, Texas. I am a member of the American Legion, past Post Commander of Post 200, also in Wallis.

BELLINOSKI: What major changes have you seen around Simonton?

BELLINOSKI: (chuckle) Quite a few. You know I said I was living in Houston when I started working in Fulshear. I used to come out on what we call Westheimer Road, going into Fulshear. At that time, in early 1946-47, when we got to Post Oak Road where the Galleria is now, you were out of town. I am talking about OUT OF TOWN. When you crossed Post Oak Road, there was nothing there.

HARGROVE: It was country?

BELLINOSKI: It's unbelievable. Starting at Post Oak Road, I think I would be fair in saying it was mostly dirt roads, not gravel, from there to Fulshear. When we got into Fulshear, it was just a spot in the road almost. There was very little there, the old red brick Harris's store on the corner, and then there was Walker Meyers, the old grocery store. Some of these old stores were more like Walmart is now; you could go in there and buy almost anything you wanted. But those days are all gone. They had a little hardware kerosene shop. You had to get bread, milk or whatever you needed somewhere else.

One of the things that I do remember real well was going into Fulshear. Of course, the road was different. We used to go by the old cemetery there. The main road out of Fulshear went right by the cemetery. Between Fulshear and that cemetery there used to be a point like a sand pit. In the summer time, you'd go through there and you would get stuck in that sand. You would have to go down there and borrow a bucket of water to pour in the sand to get out. I've did that a number of times. Then in the winter time, coming off of FM 359, going into where the Hunt place was, the road would get awfully bad there. After work, I would go into Simonton, and I'd take what is now FM 1093. When you would get about half way, just about where Weston Lakes was, there was a bad place on the road there and you'd get stuck there. I wouldn't call them gravel roads. I don't think they had any gravel on them. They were just dirt roads. It was hard to get around that area during the wintertime especially. In the hot summer time, you had to watch Fulshear on account of that sand pit. There was real deep sand and of course you'd get buried in that sand.

There were two stores in Fulshear. The Harris or Harrison Store, I think it was Harris, the big brick building was on the corner where Walker and Meyers were. In that same building, they also had a post office, just a little cubbyhole in there for the post office. Then there was also a John Deere dealership, which was run by Mr. Ed Dozier. What we called Little Ed Dozier, I think his father's name was Ed, too. Anyway, Little Ed Dozier started the John Deere dealership in Fulshear, and then later on, moved into Brookshire. His father was the one who actually started Dozier's Bar-B-Que. I am sure you have heard of it. Of course, they were very successful in that business and they did a wonderful job. They sold it, but it still exists.

I was kind of in between the Hunt Ranch and the Figure Four Ranch, which was owned by Vernon Frosts' brother, Mr. Pete Frost. Vernon Frost owned the Pecan Acres Ranch. They were all big ranchers out there at that time. All of them had several thousands of acres of land each. I understand a corporation out of China is buying up most of the land. I don't know if they are going to develop it or what. I don't know what's going to happen, but they have been buying land there for the last thirty years. And really haven't done too much with it yet. I am sure they have got something in mind.

HARGROVE: Where is Weston Lakes in comparison to that?

BELLINOSKI: Weston Lakes is almost due south. They are on FM 1093. That's where we used to get stuck right there at Weston Lakes.

HARGROVE: Do you have any photos about your life?

BELLINOSKI: I have a picture book of the ship that I was aboard. I was aboard the *USS Pennsylvania*; it served as the Flag Ship of the Pacific Fleet. I think it was one of the most active ships in the Pacific. I have that.



The battleship *USS Pennsylvania (BB38)* in World War II. Commissioned in 1916, heavily damaged and then retrofitted in 1942. Decommissioned in 1946 at Kwajalien Island.

We were talking about the war. You know we have a lot of veterans that are returning now. I feel very sorry for those people because I know what I went through when I came back. There were thousands of people that were discharged at the same time. I went in the service when I was seventeen years old on what they called a minority cruise. I had to serve until I was age twenty-one before I could be discharged.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Colloquially called a "kiddy cruise," a minority cruise was a program for individuals who were 17 years old to enlist and be discharged the day before their 21st birthday.

So, I was more or less brought up in the Navy. I recall I was discharged in November, the latter part of November in 1945. I was in the service a little over three years before I got to come home the first time. You know, just being a kid, I thought that was a long time to stay away from home, being weaned (chuckles). Anyway, what I recall mostly and I think about everyday, is about these people that are coming out of the service now. When I came out of the service, we were broke. I was already married then. We didn't have any money, nothing to speak of. If it wouldn't have been for her sister helping us out... She would give me money to get on the bus in the morning. Maybe I would go out Harrisburg, I would tell the bus driver I wanted to go out to the end of the line. I would get off, and I would start walking back. Everyplace that I would come to, I'd stop and ask for a job and you know what? There was nothing available. I finally wound up with one or two little old jobs.

Anyway I think about this all the time now. I know what these people are going through now. I think they need all the help that they can get. I was very fortunate at war. My ship was torpedoed at Okinawa, but I was fortunate I didn't get a scratch. These people coming back now, a lot of them aren't able to go and look for a job. I guess it concerns me more than anything because I know what they are going through.

HARGROVE: Sure, you've been there, you lived it.

BELLINOSKI: I've been there. Another thing that I did want to mention is that when I first went out to the ranch at Simonton, I was employed by Hunt Tool Company. I was making about a dollar an hour, which I thought was real good. Dollar an hour is a lot more than nothing, that's twice as much as nothing! (chuckles). Anyway, the going wages at the farm were fifty cents an hour.

HARGROVE: So you were making double of what they were.

BELLINOSKI: I was making double...of course I had some skills. Anyway, those people that were working out there for fifty cents an hour, now they would work for eight to ten hours a day for four or five dollars. Then later on, they passed the law; I remember that real well. The farm people had to be paid one dollar an hour. You know that's a hundred percent increase, so that did help them out. Back in those days...there was a lot...there was a lot of tough going; I'll put it like that.

HARGROVE: Things were a lot cheaper. You could get gas for thirty cents a gallon.

BELLINOSKI: Right, right.

HARGROVE: Now, here the gas yesterday was three dollars and twenty-five cents a gallon. There's a big difference, a loaf of bread was less than a dollar more like fifty cents for a loaf of bread. Now a loaf of bread is over two dollars.

BELLINOSKI: Yea, there is a lot of difference, because everything cost so much more now. There is no way in the world you could survive on a dollar and hour.

HARGROVE: These kids coming up today have so many hardships to overcome, because everything is so much more expensive.



BELLINOSKI: I feel like I have been blessed. I feel very fortunate that I got in with the right people. I got a good job and thank God for that. I thank the Hunts and the Frosts. I knew all those people quite well. Earl North was one of the neighbors there also. Earl North was the owner a Buick dealership here in Houston. He was a very generous man. All wonderful people, they are all dead and gone now.

HARGROVE: We have lost whole generations.

BELLINOSKI: That's right we sure have. That's the way it is with my wife's side of the family. All of her siblings, all of them are dead and gone, not a one left.

HARGROVE: Well, thank you for today. I sure appreciate you coming.

BELLINOSKI: Yes, Ma'am.

*Interview ends*