

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewees: **Cee Cee & David Parker**

Interview Date: 08/26/2009

Interviewers: Jane Goodsill & Bruce Kelly

Transcriber: Marsha Smith

Location: Hidden Territory Farm, Sugar Land, Texas

11 Pages



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Cee Cee Parker

Transcript

GOODSILL: Would you describe the location of the land you will be talking about today?

PARKER, D: We are on 31 acres just southwest of the intersection of 90 and 99. We are located in the middle of New Territory subdivision. We're actually part of a 100 acre out-parcel that was NOT developed when New Territory was developed. What we've found through real property records is that on March 25, 1828, Mr. Jesse Cartwright petitioned the commissioner, Jasper Flores, with the Mexican government, for 2 leagues of land in Fort Bend County. Apparently Commissioner Flores had replaced Commissioner Bastrop, from whom the original petition was requested. According to the petition, Mr. Cartwright moved to the county three years prior to the petition, had worked the land, and done what was needed to be granted this property. In that same document, Stephen F. Austin, who was the Honorable *Compresario* at the time, agreed with and supported Cartwright's claim that he had indeed been working the land and had been there for three years. So on March 27, 1828, the 2 leagues of land were granted to Jesse H. Cartwright, one of which was the league that our land is located in.

On June 2, 1881, P. Cartwright, H. P. Cartwright and L. E. Cartwright, who we assume are the sons of Jesse Cartwright, sold 100 acres out of that original league to two gentlemen: Primus Thompson and Paul Thompson, who we assume were brothers. The land was held in the Thompson family until May 25, 1959. At that point in time Will Thompson, the great-grandson of Paul Thompson, (there was Paul Thompson, Senior; Paul Thompson, Jr. and then a son, Will Thompson) granted a Deed of Trust on thirty acres out of that 100 acres to a W. A. Gless, who was a tractor dealer—implement dealer—in the area. Apparently Mr. Gless had given a tractor loan to Will Thompson in the amount of \$6,881.00 and the Deed of Trust on this property was given to Mr. Gless to secure that promissory note. The Thompsons were a black family. We've seen other documents in which Primus Thompson is described as "Primus Thompson, a freed man."

There are also some wills and bills of sales that we've seen in researching this property that talk about the sale of cattle, horses and three boys or three girls. It would really be interesting to know something about Primus and Paul Thompson. They were evidently freed slaves. This happened in 1877. Were Primus Thompson and Paul Thompson brothers? I know they were slaves because it says so on two of the lease documents. Paul was buying the PT brand from Primus and all the stock. We have descriptions and there was even a statement that Paul and his wife were going to work for Primus: "Paul Thompson, hire of himself and wife."

KELLY: There's a website called AfriGeneas, where people have transcribed interviews with slaves and there are a few who lived in this area that talk about what life was like.

PARKER, C.: The majority of this out-parcel was held in the Thompson family. To a large degree, the balance of the 100-acre parcel that the Thompsons purchased back in 1881 is still within the extended Thompson-Bishop family. The Bishops are related to the Thompsons, I believe, through marriage. A good portion of the property within this 100 acre out-parcel is still owned by black families. There are some Hispanic families as well, but most of the families that live in this neighborhood are Bishops or Thompsons, or related thereto, through marriage.

GOODSILL: They are all contiguous to your property?

PARKER, C.: Correct.

GOODSILL: And your property is how many acres of the 100?

PARKER, C.: Thirty-one. Our western boundary is bordered by New Territory. On our north is Municipal Utility District #112 and New Territory houses. On our eastern boundary is the Thompson-Bishop property, and on the southern boundary is a single street subdivision; the street name is Pecan Grove. It has been there since the 1950s. It consists of about ten houses that are on two to five acre tracts. McVey Lane runs directly to the east of our property and that's how our eastern neighbors access their homes. The McVey's live on the property directly to the south of us. They've been in the area for a long time as well.

So anyway, back to the Thompsons. According to the Gless', who we bought the property from, W. A. Gless, the grandfather, was the tractor dealer. He took this Deed of Trust in 1959. According to the Gless' grandson, who was our broker on the deal, Mr. Thompson was not able to pay off that promissory note. So on June 17, 1968, he executed a deed conveying the property to W. A. Gless. In that deed, he retained a life estate, in which he could live and remain on the property until his dying days. And according to the Gless', that's exactly what happened. There was an 8' x 12' house on the property, a ship-lap house that Mr. Thompson supposedly lived in until the day he died. There was some question about the title, whether it was community property or not community property that was conveyed.

There was actually a Trespass to Try Title suit brought against the Gless' in 1993, from the descendants of Mary Thompson, Will Thompson's wife, to determine whether or not his conveyance of the property to the Gless' was valid as to her community property. In 1993 the judge decreed that it was valid as to her community property. So clear title was effectively granted through the judgment.

That is the history of the property as we know it, at the time the Gless' bought it back in 1968. W. A. Gless was a rice farmer in El Campo and believed in holding property. So he didn't do anything with this tract of land, other than lease it for grazing to some of the neighbors. When he died, the property was passed to his wife. When she passed away, the property was passed to her two children, a daughter and a son. The daughter, unfortunately, died not long after her mother died, or maybe died before she died. Anyway, the property was passed in a trust. We bought the property from Mr. Gless, her son. He was executor of the trust. The property had stayed in the Gless family trust up until the time we bought it. The trust was to terminate at the time the younger of the daughter's two boys turned thirty. At the time we wanted to buy, his turning thirty was imminent and the Trust was going to terminate. We bought it in July, 2006.

GOODSILL: When you bought the property, you did some historic research on this land. Is there anything you can share about what you discovered?

PARKER, C.: Most of what we've found out about this land we've heard either from neighbors or the Gless'. Our understanding was that at one point in time, this property was used for cotton farming. That's part of the reason why, out of the 100-acre parcel, a majority of the property is divided into homesteads; half-acre or quarter-acre tracts, and this property has remained a contiguous piece of land. For years it was used as the official dump site for the whole neighborhood. We had three big holes on the property into which trash had been dumped. As the lore goes they put a stick of dynamite down and blew out big holes in the ground, and used them for all the waste. We cleaned them out and other than just normal detritus we pulled out an old farm truck, a Volkswagen and 200 tires. Everybody in the community used it. After cleaning out the trash, we had the dynamite holes reworked and enlarged to become ponds. To this day you cannot walk around what are now the ponds on this property barefooted. There's broken glass everywhere.

PARKER, D.: At one point in time, this property was accessed by a different road; it was a forty-foot road that ran the length of the property. It was actually part of the Sartartia Plantation.

GOODSILL: This property was contiguous with Sartartia Plantation?

PARKERS: Correct.

GOODSILL: Was it ever part of Sartartia?

PARKER, D.: It was never part of Sartartia.

GOODSILL: Any idea of why that was?

PARKER, C.: The story is that when slavery was abolished, the plantation owners would allow the freed slaves to purchase property close to or on the plantation in order for them to stay and work. That's what we were told about this place. I don't know if it is true, because they bought it from Mr. Cartwright and Cartwright was around before the Sartartia Plantation was established. I guess that was back with the Ellis'. Bruce, I'm looking at you because you know the history.

KELLY: Littleberry Ellis bought his property in the late 1870s/early 1880s and named it Sartartia. It was the Ellis Plantation and he named it after his daughter, Sartartia. I'm not sure he bought it from Cartwright or not. In any case, according to your research the Thompsons bought this property from Cartwright.

PARKER, C.: Yes, they bought it from Cartwright in 1881 per County Clerk Instrument #1881161001.

KELLY: I am assuming that they were probably slaves of Cartwright?

PARKER, C.: That would be the question. Documents that we found in our search revealed that Primus Thompson was a successful black man in this area. He leased property from the Frosts and apparently was fairly active. We haven't seen much about Paul Thompson, although there is a bill of sale where Primus Thompson sold their P Bar brand (P with a bar underneath it — P) and all their livestock to Paul. In later references to this property they talk about volume and page number for this deed from the Cartwrights to the two Thompsons, but they call it only the Paul Thompson deed. They don't use Primus's name, which I think is kind of interesting.

KELLY: There were some Thompsons who settled early-on in the area around Richmond. Often slaves were named after their slave owners. You might research that to see if you find listings for Primus. You might find slaves listed as Primus and Paul with the Cartwrights or the Thompsons or Frosts. That's where I would look for clues.

PARKER, D.: We have documents from Primus Thompson, starting in 1867, two years after the Civil War, where he was leasing property from the Frosts. Most of them are in the name of V. M. Frost, who we think is Virginia M. Frost. There were a series of leases. Don't know if they were the same piece of property. It almost reads like they were different pieces of property. One lease comes in and then there's another lease while this other lease is in effect. So maybe he's leasing increasingly larger pieces of property up through 1876. He had a five-year lease on Frost property. As we put the dates together, 1876 plus 5 takes us to the 1881 when he's with the Cartwrights, buying the 100 acres for \$1,000. It was just two years after the Civil War. Was he with the Frosts earning money until he could buy his own property and bought this 100-acres from the Cartwrights in 1881? Another aside, in 1894, according to the property records, it looks like he took a half-acre in the very corner of his property, and dedicated it to the New Hope Missionary Baptists.

PARKER, C.: And that became Thompson's Chapel!

GOODSILL: Tell us what you know about the chapel.

PARKER, D.: Well, that's about it. We know he gave that half acre in 1894 and there continues to be a church on that same plot of land.

KELLY: At one time there was a school attached to it as part of the Sugar Land Independent School District. We interviewed a person whose mother actually taught there. [see John Pirtle Interview]

PARKER, C.: How neat!

KELLY: You pulled up a record that shows that in 1950, Sugar Land Independent School District sold or gave the half-acre back to the Thompson Chapel. So I guess now they have a whole acre.

PARKER, C.: I think they do.

PARKER, D.: Kind of a testament to what Mr. Thompson did back before the turn of the century. Just years after he bought the property, he dedicated it to his community for a church.

KELLY: [Looking at map provided by the Parkers.] There is a cemetery just off your property.

PARKER, C: There is a cemetery at the end of McVey Lane. In the wintertime when the leaves aren't out, you can see it from the back corner of our property. Funny story: David was in our front yard one day and a lady drove in. She said she was looking for her father's grave and didn't know where the property was. David took her over so that she could find out where her father was buried.

PARKER, D.: It was a very touching story. As I recall she had just graduated from college. She had never known her father. Evidently mother and father had broken up when she was a baby. She was a very well spoken black woman looking for her roots and the grave of her father. Evidently her father was buried in this cemetery.

KELLY: Early on, you were telling us how the Cartwrights got this land. It was my impression that Stephen F. Austin originally owned the five leagues that your property is in. He received those in 1823. He decided to homestead in San Felipe so he sold the western four leagues, which included the Cartwright property. The fifth league, where Sugar Land is, he gave to Samuel May Williams in gratitude for services rendered by Williams to Austin. Williams was his secretary. So it sounds like maybe Cartwright was living on the land while Austin owned it, and Austin allowed Cartwright to buy it.

PARKER, C.: This [producing a document] is the grant. I have seen the translation from the original Spanish deed. It attests to the fact that the person translating it is certified. It's very touching, in that Cartwright is talking about the fact that he's done everything that he needed to do and now he's asking for the gift of this property.

This is Cartwright being quoted: "I'm presenting myself before you and I say that having moved to this county three years ago with my family and having been received as a colonist by the Honorable *Compresario* Stephen F. Austin, in his first enterprise of colonization and because the absence of the former Commissioner Bastrop has prevented me from receiving a title of possession to the lands which I have selected, in virtue of the permission which the said *Compresario* gave me, and knowing that you are appointed," etc etc. It then goes on to where Stephen F. Austin is writing to the commissioner: "In virtue of your foregoing decree, the petitioner who makes application, Jesse Cartwright, is worthy of the favor which he solicits and that what he sets forth in the petition is true. In consideration of which, and the good qualities and circumstances and the industry to which he dedicated himself, let there be granted to him one league and one labor of land, wherever he requests them."

Then the Commissioner comes back to Commissioner Flores and Stephen F. Austin, *Compresario*, that he was granted the authority to “establish a new colony in Texas, in virtue of the Commissioners — the Commission conferred upon the first (being the Commissioner) by the order of his Excellency, the next governor of this state...” (and then the writing gets really bad). But basically Stephen F. Austin was given the job of colonizing this area and therefore he had the right to pass out this land and grant it.

KELLY: There was never an Austin grant from the Mexican government but he had selected these five leagues and was holding them for himself. When he decided to homestead in San Felipe instead these men had to go to—

PARKER, C.: —to the Mexican governor—

KELLY: to get the grant.

PARKER, C.: So they didn’t buy it from the Frosts.

KELLY: That may be some misinformation. Its not correct from what you’ve said, and it makes more sense from what I’ve read. Also, it was in 1828 that Samuel May Williams got the league in what is now Sugar Land. So evidently he dispossessed his right to these lands in 1828.

PARKER, C.: Which would make sense because he’s definitely part of the whole granting procedure.

KELLY: And all of the land grants are in different names.

PARKER, C.: I guess the *Compresario* is the gentleman who the Mexican government gave the authority to distribute the land grants.

KELLY: I have also heard that Stephen F. Austin actually surveyed much of the land in these leagues himself. It would be interesting to know if he actually surveyed this league.

PARKER, C.: There IS a handwritten survey. Unfortunately, at the time I was looking at it, I wasn’t paying attention to who DID that survey, but you may be right.

KELLY: Fort Bend County Clerk Dianne Wilson told us that Fort Bend County originally belonged to Austin County. And Austin County still has a lot of the original documents from the early times. Their records are not on-line like Fort Bend County’s are, but if you want to go search their records, that’s where to go.

PARKER, C.: Really! I want to go.

KELLY: I don't know when Fort Bend became a county.

PARKER, C.: It was before this time, because they refer to the county of Fort Bend in these documents.

KELLY: What year is that?

PARKER, C.: They start with 1828.

KELLY: Well, it could be that all the records were kept in San Felipe.

PARKER, C.: Oh, because that was the seat of government.

KELLY: And they didn't give up those records of Fort Bend County.

PARKER, C.: Yeah, you're right. I DID hear that.

KELLY: So that might be somewhere to go and check.

PARKER, D.: The unit of measurement used for surveying a long time ago was chains. 100 chains makes a furlong, like in horse racing. Well, that was from chains. This (pointing to a survey map) is measured in chains. So the area we just drove from the north to the south end of the property was 31.6 chains. (laughing).

PARKER, C.: (sounds of paper being shuffled) Okay, so this is it. Stephen F. Austin says he's a good guy, give him this land. The two gentlemen together say, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, we're going to give it him."

PARKER, D.: We used to have all that in Spanish.

PARKER, C.: Yeah, that's pretty cool! It's really neat writing!

PARKER, D.: I've got it in a file somewhere.

KELLY: Samuel May Williams is the one who wrote everything up in Spanish. He spoke and wrote fluent Spanish. He worked under Stephen F. Austin and kept all the records. He came up with the innovation of taking each deed and putting them in a book. They'd never done that before. I'm reading a book on him. He's very interesting. If you want to read about Texas history, he was the number two man under Austin; it is fascinating stuff.

PARKER, C.: Another document from public records talks about Commissioner Flores and *Impresario* Austin. "The witnesses, James Beard, Thomas Borden, the adjoining owner, the surveyor, Horatio Chrismon, and the party in interest, Jesse Cartwright, we repaired to the league of land which by the foregoing act we have granted to this last named person, situated upon the eastern margin of the Brazos River, adjoining the league granted to the widow, Jane Wilkins." This makes it sound like Horatio Chrismon was the surveyor.

KELLY: What year was that?

PARKER, C.: This is for the years 1826 and 1827.

KELLY: Well, he probably did survey it. I doubt if Austin surveyed all of them. He started in 1823. By 1826 he may have been handing it off to somebody else.

PARKER, C.: Can you make out the 'hen scratch' any better than I can? It may be a break in the page where they recorded it. It says, "...and the widow, Jane, and then her next name..." I love this, "You go distance from a cottonwood situated in the north.'

KELLY: Oh, Samuel May Williams signed this?

GOODSILL: That's not his signature, that's the person transcribing it from Spanish to English.

KELLY: Ah, so maybe he translated, too. Here's Stephen F. Austin. He didn't sign it. This isn't a signature but it's Jasper Flores and...

PARKER, C.: Martin Kinney. "I certify that the foregoing seven pages contain a correct translated copy of the original title to Jesse Cartwright in the Spanish archives of this office." Signed by Martin M. Kinney, a Spanish translator.

And THEN you get: "I, Charles Grogan, Commissioner of the General Land Office of the State of Texas, do hereby certify that Martin Kinney, whose signature is subscribed to the foregoing certificate, is the Spanish translator of this office, duly qualified according to law. And that his official acts, as such, is entitled to full faith and credit." Isn't that wild!

PARKER, D.: I don't know if it was from Cartwright or from Thompson, but I had a document that described *livery of siesin*. The Stewart Title Company's logo is *livery of siesin*. In old England, when property changed hands it was not the document that actually made the property change hands, it was a ceremony.

I have a document somewhere that says something like, “I have walked on the property, I have shouted aloud, I have turned the dirt, I have thrown a stone” and it actually described these things that either Cartwright or Thompson did, to take possession in the *livery of siesin* ceremony, for this property.

PARKER, C: [looking at documents] *Varas* is a Spanish measurement of length. All of these old descriptions are in leagues and *varas*.

End of Interview

Editor’s Note: Since this interview, the Parkers have worked with Texas Parks and Wildlife to create a wildlife management plan for the property with the goal of preserving and enhancing the property for the benefit of the area wildlife. The property now hosts a variety of native birds; including a pair of nesting Red-tailed Hawks; ponds that are home to turtles, fish and frogs; and a resident deer herd.



Bob the Buck and other wildlife thrive on the nature preserve.